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**Exploring Teachers' Perceptions of Positive and Negative Attitudes  
toward Teachers and the Teaching Profession**

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**Exploring Teachers' Perceptions of Positive and Negative Attitudes  
Toward Teachers and the Teaching Profession**

**by**

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## **Dedication**

To the teachers of West Virginia, Oklahoma, Arizona, Kentucky, and Colorado, who have taken it upon themselves to stand up against the too-long accepted belief that teachers are willing to work for less than they deserve.

And to the staff, parents, school leaders, and district leaders standing behind these teachers, who give me hope that positive changes can come to our schools when our calls for change are issued in unison.

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# **Exploring Teachers' Perceptions of Positive and Negative Attitudes Toward Teachers and the Teaching Profession**

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According to the OECD (2014), only one-third of U.S. teachers reported that teaching was “valued” or “highly valued” by U.S. society. Still others have argued that teachers’ perceptions of negative attitudes may be exaggerated (Hargreaves et al., 2007). However, given widespread teacher turnover, along with decreasing enrollments in teacher preparation programs, examining teachers’ perceptions of attitudes toward their occupation likely would provide useful insight into these and related problems facing American schools. Guiding questions for this study addressed teachers’ perceptions of attitudes, contexts in which attitudes were perceived, teachers’ interpretations or responses to perceived attitudes, and differences in perceived attitudes between bioecological (Bronfenbrenner, 1999) and sociocultural contexts. Qualitative methodologies that drew on principles and procedures from grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) were used.

In all, 18 public school teachers (nine who taught in Massachusetts and nine who taught in Texas) were interviewed about attitudes they perceived in their interactions with various groups of individuals (e.g., friends, students, administrators), and attitudes embedded in more distal contexts (e.g., media, policy, culture). Based on analyses of these interviews, I found that teachers reported perceiving four types of positive (i.e., *appreciative, respectful, trusting/supportive, occupational*) and negative (i.e., *adversarial,*

*demeaning, unprofessional, stereotypes*) attitudes toward teaching. These attitudes were perceived in interactions across eight bioecological contexts that ranged from the interpersonal (e.g., *adversarial* attitudes in interactions with students' parents; positive *occupational* attitudes in interactions with friends and family) to the societal (e.g., *stereotypes* of teachers in the media, *demeaning* attitudes imbedded in U.S. culture). I also found that teachers perceived different attitudes despite having similar experiences. For example, a number of teachers described experiences in which non-teachers expressed that they "could never be a teacher." A number of participants interpreted such statements as *respectful*, yet others perceived them as *demeaning* or expressed ambivalence about the attitudes perceived in such statements. Finally, I identified bioecological and sociocultural differences between teachers that appeared to correspond with variation in perceptions of attitudes toward teaching. These findings have implications for improving school climate and for supporting preservice teachers, as they reflect on their expectations of themselves as future teachers.



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## **Chapter 1: Introduction and Rationale**

The present study was designed to explore how public school teachers in the United States experience what they perceive to be common attitudes about their occupation, focusing particularly on the contexts and relationships in which others' attitudes are made salient; the perceived positivity/negativity of general attitudes; and the ways that teachers interpret demonstrations of such attitudes. Attitudes, which are socially and culturally constructed, likely differ across school systems as a product of the dominant ideology and demographics in each community, making it important to capture experiences from teachers in distinct contexts. Thus, I interviewed 18 public school K-12 teachers from Texas and Massachusetts, states that have vastly different approaches to public education (for more, see chapter 3). Juxtaposing the experiences of teachers in these two states allowed for inferences to be drawn about how attitudes differ across social, political, geographical, and cultural contexts, and how teachers within different contexts are affected by the perceptions broadcast around them.

In this chapter, I provide the rationale for studying teachers' perceptions of others' attitudes toward teaching by situating the topic within Bronfenbrenner's (1999) bioecological contexts. Within discussions of the distal macro- and exosystems, I address issues related to occupational status and prestige, occupational gender-typing, and teacher professionalization. Findings in these fields have demonstrated that teacher attrition rates and general staffing issues relate to how teaching is valued, categorized, and gendered in the United States. Specifically, I explain how current problems concerning teacher recruitment and retention relate to the low status afforded to the occupation; how increasing pressure around teacher accountability deprofessionalizes the occupation; and how the cultural association of teaching with "women's work" has degraded its social standing.

These large-scale cultural conceptions of teaching, however, do not represent the range of individual attitudes toward teachers or how these attitudes are expressed, nor do they point to the impacts of attitudes on teachers themselves. This is why proximal micro- and mesosystems must also be considered. Presently, despite recognition that “only 34% [of American teachers] believe that teaching is valued by U.S. society” (Country Notes, 2014, p. 1), there is little research that directly addresses the impact of such beliefs on individual teachers. I present an overview of research on stigma consciousness (Pinel, 1999) and stereotype threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995) as evidence that perceptions of others’ attitudes can affect a person’s emotions, motivation, decision-making, and actions, and therefore deserve continued examination.

Finally, I provide a methodological rationale for the study. I argue that the current approach to research on teachers is overly focused on job satisfaction and school/classroom-specific factors, and that it cannot capture an accurate profile of American teachers without the inclusion of more specific factors related to teachers’ experiences as teachers outside of their school and classroom contexts. Research questions are then presented at the end of the chapter.

#### **DISTAL SYSTEMS: STATUS, PROFESSIONALIZATION, AND GENDER**

According to Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems theory, every individual is continuously influenced by forces within a set of concentric systems. The *macrosystem* refers to society’s prevailing ideology, culture, and social norms, all of which dictate how individuals in that system think, feel, and behave. Similarly, the *exosystem* surrounds and “indirectly [influences local contexts] by altering, defining, and/or prescribing what takes place in a given setting” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 514). Existing research on the occupational status, professionalization, and gender stereotyping of teaching has engaged

with issues in these broad systems. In the following sections, I provide an overview of what is known about general perceptions of teaching in terms of occupational status/prestige, professionalization, and gender stereotyping, and how normative perceptions discourage individuals from becoming teachers and drive teachers from the classroom.

### **Occupational Status**

Occupational status is a general label for the social standing afforded to an occupation. Overall, the status of teaching is relatively low across much of the globe, and the United States holds its teachers in particularly low regard (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2014; OECD). There are many reasons that certain professions are afforded more or less status, although teaching defies many of those patterns. For instance, more than 99% of public school teachers in U.S. schools have four-year college degrees, surpassing the international average of 91% (OECD, 2014); and nearly 60% of public school teachers hold master's or doctoral degrees (NCES, 2013c). However, teaching continues to be afforded a level of status that does not reflect these high levels of educational attainment, professional development, and licensing. Teachers earn salaries near the median for bachelor's degree holders in the United States, yet the highest paid teachers earn far less than their equally experienced/educated peers in other fields (Ingersoll, 2011).

The status afforded to an occupation has implications for the individuals in that line of work. For instance, low-status occupations have been linked to increased health risks (Morales, Lara, Kington, Valdez, & Escarce, 2002), including a specific association between ischemic heart disease and occupations that feature “a mismatch between high workload and low control over occupational status” (Siegrist, Peter, Junge, Cremer, & Seidel, 1990, p. 1127). A significant negative correlation was found between women's



waist-to-hip ratio (a risk factor for many diseases) and occupational status (Brunner et al., 1997; Rosmond, Lapidus, Mårin, & Björntorp, 1996); and positive associations have been found between parents' occupational status and children's academic and behavioral outcomes (Appleyard, Egeland, Dulmen, & Sroufe, 2005; Caldas & Bankston, 1997). Occupational status differentials can also complicate interactions between teachers and parents (Hargreaves, 1998; Lasky, 2000).

It is possible, however, that the relatively low status afforded to teachers may have broader, more far reaching effects on various aspects of public education as well. Status is closely related to the attractiveness of a profession (Carrington, 2002), meaning that individuals who might otherwise become excellent teachers are likely to choose higher status careers, even if those jobs are not higher paying. This phenomenon is self-perpetuating as well: when highly qualified, motivated undergraduates look past colleges of education in favor of more prestigious majors and career prospects, teacher preparation programs are left with smaller and/or inappropriate applicant pools. This can project the unintended message that admissions and course work in these programs is less rigorous than other programs, thereby further perpetuating the low status of studying education (Tyack & Tobin, 1994).

Similarly, media coverage of teacher shortages across the United States perpetuates the image of teaching as a low status occupation. Despite the system-wide nature of America's teacher turnover/burnout crisis, research on teacher attrition typically has focused on school-level and teacher-level characteristics of those teachers who stay in teaching and those who leave (see Guarino, Santibanez, & Daley, 2006 for a review). The interest in individual characteristics of teachers comes out of traditional labor economics research that is often used to explain trends in employment. One such law posits that "Professionals choose to be teachers because they believe that the combination of wages,

working conditions, and unobservable factors they will receive from teaching will yield greater benefits than they would receive from another occupation” (Struck & Robinson, 2006, p. 68). This perspective suggests that teachers weigh the value of their jobs against *opportunity wage* (Dolton & van der Klaauw, 1998), which is the combined value assigned to other jobs for which they are qualified. As long as the value of teaching outweighs opportunity wage, they will continue to teach. Once opportunity wage overtakes the value teachers place on their teaching jobs, they likely will leave the field.

This way of understanding occupational attrition is highly individualistic, in that each individual will appraise the value of her/his teaching job and her/his ability to secure a non-teaching job differently. By this logic, public reports of teacher shortages and turnover rates perpetuate an image of teaching as a job that is of low value to large numbers of individuals, and that those who stay in teaching must simply have low opportunity wage. Thus, based on the way economists and labor researchers understand professional attrition, it is assumed that those who remain in teaching either value it more than those who leave or, more problematically, are not qualified to do anything else. However, this conception of teacher turnover does not explain why attrition is inversely associated with number of years teaching (Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014). This seems to indicate that, over time, teachers become more capable and resilient as they acquire resources and on-the-job skills necessary to navigate the demands of their work (Lineback, 2018). In this way, teacher status and teacher retention are intimately and reciprocally related to one another.

### **Gender Stereotyping: Teaching as Women’s Work**

The impact of prestige/status on recruitment and retention of teachers is also related to occupational gender-typing, one of the most salient characteristics of any job (Glick, Wilk, & Perreault, 1995; Gottfredson, 1981). It is well documented that men are less likely

to become teachers (Apple, 1987; Francis, 2008; Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014; Williams, 1995), and they are more likely to leave the field (Strunk & Robinson, 2006). One of the common themes that runs through existing research on the gender imbalance in teaching involves men's preference for higher status and higher paying careers (Burgess & Carter, 1992; Carrington, 2002; Thornton, 1997). Qualitative research on men's career preferences has demonstrated that men view teaching at the primary level in particular as the lowest status type of teaching (Shinar, 1975; White, Kruczek, Brown, & White, 1989; White & White, 2006), and men are more likely to teach at the secondary level because of this (Mills, 2000). The demographics of American teachers supports this finding, as just over 41% of high school teachers are male, yet less than 24% of teachers overall are male (NCES, 2013b).

Secondary teaching is often considered a higher status option because it requires subject-area content knowledge (Millis, 2000), reflecting proficiency in a particular area of expertise. Specialization and wealth of knowledge are central in determining whether or not an occupation is "professional" (Darling-Hammond, 1990), and it is easy to see how a degree in European history, for example, is required for one to teach European history effectively. Conversely, the opacity of elementary teachers' specialized knowledge and its role in preparing them to teach may interfere with the general public's willingness to see the work of elementary teaching as equally "professional."

### **Teacher Professionalism and Recruitment**

Regardless of grade level, teaching is seen often as "semi-professional" (Etzioni, 1969). In recent years, this has been attributed to teachers' decreasing autonomy in the face of prescriptive curricula and the need to meet specific testing standards (Willis & Sandholtz, 2009). As autonomy decreases, teachers' own knowledge, ability, and training

become less relevant to their practice, and this continues to depress teacher professionalization, making it less desirable for talented, ambitious college graduates who might otherwise see promise in the occupation.

Decreasing levels of autonomy among American teachers is also problematic when considering the myriad positive outcomes associated with teacher autonomy. Increasing teacher autonomy has been found to decrease on-the-job stress and increase feelings of empowerment and professionalism (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005). Teacher autonomy has also been connected to “adaptive motivational and emotional outcomes” (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014, p. 68) for teachers. Unfortunately, shifting ideology and policy have continued to remove autonomy from teaching, thereby making the occupation less professional and subsequently less deserving of autonomy, as autonomy is understood to be a privilege of the professional realm.

#### **MICROSYSTEMS: ATTITUDES AND THEIR IMPACT ON THE INDIVIDUAL**

Relationships between an individual and his/her family, colleagues, friends, and neighbors are at the heart of what Bronfenbrenner (1979) termed the *microsystem*, whereas the *mesosystem* is composed of the relationships between occupants of the microsystem. Unlike the more distal exo- and macrosystems, agents within these local contexts impact the individual through interpersonal interaction. Although research on the outer systems is helpful in situating teaching within broad social frameworks and ideological contexts, research on local systems and relationships may provide valuable insight into how attitudes are indexed in social interactions, and how a teacher’s sense-of-self may develop or change when she/he is made aware of others’ perceptions and attitudes.

In this section, I begin by addressing relevant background on attitude development. Next, I use the constructs of *stigma consciousness* (Pinel, 1999) and *stereotype threat*

(Steele & Aronson, 1999) to demonstrate how awareness of others' attitudes, regardless of whether or not the attitudes are explicitly expressed, can influence individuals' emotions, cognition, and behavior.

### **Attitude Development**

Both attitudes and beliefs direct individuals' thoughts and behavior (Richardson, 1996). *Beliefs*, or "conviction about phenomena or objects that are accepted as true (regardless of actual truth)" (Dejoy, 1999, p. 186), are the foundational elements from which attitudes emerge. *Attitudes* represent the "relatively enduring organization of beliefs about an object or situation predisposing one to respond in some preferential manner" (Rokeach, 1966, p. 529). In other words, the term *attitude* can be applied broadly to an individual's evaluation of anything in his/her social world (Petty, Wheeler, & Tormala, 2003).

Considering that "the tendency to evaluate basic stimuli as positive or negative...appears to be an initial step in our effort to make sense out of the world" (Baron, Byrne, & Branscombe, 2007, p. 93), attitudes often develop below the level of conscious awareness and take root quickly. The innate tendency to categorize stimuli as positive or negative extends to the self and the groups with which an individual identifies. Thus, our understanding of the world is largely shaped by attitudes, although the precise relationship between attitudes and behavior remains controversial.

Ample evidence has indicated that attitudes are more likely to predict behavior when they are easily accessible and deeply rooted (Ajzen, 2001). Considering the number of teachers with whom young people will interact during their years of compulsory education, and the frequency and duration of exposure to these teachers, it is likely that

attitudes about teaching based on experiences as students become deeply rooted and easily accessible.

The attitudes developed by students, which will reflect reasoning and understanding in line with their physical and psychological maturation, are likely to persist into adulthood. This tendency has been identified in teachers as well. Many educators come into the occupation with unrealistic expectations about teaching that are based on their memories of being a student (Furlong, 2013). How individuals think about, understand, and evaluate teachers and teaching is heavily influenced by the interactions that they had with teachers when they were students.

Outside of interactions, attitudes also form through observations of others' behavior (Greenwald, 1989; e.g., Fossey, 1993 on attitudes toward alcohol; Wilson, 1971 on attitudes toward the deaf). This can occur below the level of conscious awareness if, while focusing on the object under evaluation, positive or negative feelings subtly are triggered (Krosnick, Betz, Jussim, & Lynn, 1992). Attitudes also can take root when an individual is praised or rewarded for expressing a given attitude (Noel, Wann, & Branscombe, 1995). In some situations, individuals who observe well-respected or well-liked others endorse an attitude will internalize that attitude as well.

### **Perceptions of Others' Attitudes**

The body of research on stereotype threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995) has provided clear evidence that awareness of others' attitudes can affect an individual's psychological and emotional state, as well as behavior. *Stereotype threat* deals with a specific type of attitude (i.e., stereotypes) and the manner in which members of stereotyped groups, when made aware of an existing stereotype about their group, realize that "anything one does or any of one's features that conform to it make the stereotype more plausible as a self-

characterization in the eyes of others, and perhaps even in one's own eyes" (Steele & Aronson, 1995, p 797). When a stereotype-threatened state is triggered, individuals try less hard and underperform on tests and problem-solving tasks. However, these effects are contingent upon an individual's awareness of the stereotype in that moment. For instance, Aronson et al. (1999) gave a math test to two groups of white male individuals: one group was told that their performance would be compared to Asian male students, and the other was not. For the former group, the stereotype of Asians' superiority in math was triggered, giving way to stereotype threat. In the end, the group in which stereotype threat was triggered performed significantly worse than the group for whom race was not discussed.

A related construct, *stigma consciousness* (Pinel, 1999), is the extent to which an individual is aware of/sensitive to stigma pertaining to her/his identity. Individuals high in stigma consciousness are more likely to identify bias/prejudice in ambiguous situations (Wang, Stroebe, & Dovidio, 2012), more likely to evaluate others' behavior as disrespectful (Pinel, 2004), and for those who felt stigmatized by their occupational title, more likely to quit (Pinel & Paulin, 2005; Wildes, 2007).

Although teacher identity is not stigmatized, there are negative stereotypes and misconceptions about teaching that have not been systematically examined in terms of their impact on teachers' emotional and behavioral outcomes. Some teachers may be more or less aware of/sensitive to these attitudes and beliefs about teaching or may be aware of distinct sets of attitudes and beliefs. If so, there likely will be important consequences of those differences. For instance, Major, Barr, Zubek, and Babey (1999) found that women who worked in occupations that were generally seen as undesirable were more likely to experience loss of self-esteem. Thus, female teachers who are more aware of negative or devaluing attitudes toward teaching may be particularly vulnerable to self-esteem loss. That is why it is necessary to examine teachers' perceptions of attitudes toward teaching,

the contexts and experiences in which those attitudes have been made salient, and the diversity of responses and interpretations within the teaching community.

## **METHODOLOGICAL RATIONALE**

The existing literature on attitudes toward teaching is based almost exclusively on measures of status, professionalism, and similarly discrete, quantitative constructs. The complementary, albeit limited, work on how teachers believe they are perceived has been based on large-scale investigations that do not include nuanced analyses of individual and contextual differences (e.g., Hargreaves et al., 2006, 2007; Country notes, 2014). These methodological approaches “are uninformed by the lived experience of the people studied” (Schulze & Angermeyer, 2003, p. 300), and neglect the importance of interpersonal interactions that are the sites at which identities and their relative status positions are made manifest (Buckholtz & Hall, 2005). By interviewing teachers and orienting the interview protocol around reflections on interpersonal experiences in which attitudes about teachers were made salient, I sought to locate various contexts in which teachers perceived expressions of attitudes, and to identify means by which teachers interpreted these contextualized interactions as reflecting others’ attitudes toward teaching. Unlike more discrete, quantitative approaches, interviews allowed for a nuanced analysis of teacher’ experiences across bioecological and sociocultural contexts as my participants reflected on and responded to the instances that had informed their perceptions of attitudes toward teaching.

The argument could be made that this approach relies too heavily on teachers’ own interpretations of others’ nonverbal and/or indirect expression of attitudes. However, it is teachers’ interpretation of interactions, not the speakers’ intentions, that inform how teachers proceed in, recall, and reflect upon a given interaction. Thus, in collecting and



analyzing these data, I maintained focus on the teachers' thoughts and interpretations without presenting the qualitative data as evidence of attitudes that assuredly exist in the general public.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

This study was guided by four research questions, each of which is both grounded in and designed to advance the literatures described in Chapters 1 and 2. The overarching question driving this project is, "What do teachers perceive to be common types of attitudes toward teaching?" Beyond the fact that two-thirds to U.S. teachers do not believe that their work is valued (Country notes, 2014), little is known about teachers' perceptions of attitudes toward teachers and teaching. However, there is extensive empirical support indicating that heightened awareness of negative attitudes toward a group with which one identifies is associated with negative cognitive, emotional, and even physiological outcomes. In light of this, teachers' perceptions of attitudes toward teaching warrants further study.

Whereas the first research question was concerned with *what* attitudes teachers perceive, the second question was designed to probe *who*, *when*, and *where*, by asking "In what contexts/interactions are others' attitudes made salient to teachers?" The majority of research on teacher wellbeing, job satisfaction, and attrition has focused on school-based relationships and school-based factors. Drawing on Bronfenbrenner's (1999) model, I sought to examine teachers' experiences across a wide range of contexts and relationships in order to determine whether school-based investigations of teachers' occupational/psychological outcomes adequately represent the psychosocial experience of being a teacher in the United States.

With the third and fourth research questions, I sought to develop a preliminary impression of *how* and *why* bioecological and sociocultural differences may affect teachers' occupational lives and feelings about their work. The third research question asked, "What do teachers think and feel when they interpret attitudes toward teaching?" The final research question was, "Do teachers' experiences in regards to the previous questions differ across bioecological and sociocultural contexts?" According to Bronfenbrenner (1999), each individual is the product of a lifetime of processes and interactions across their various contexts. Thus, each teacher will develop a highly individualized understanding of what it means to be a teacher, and what "teacher" means to others.

In the following chapters, I describe the current study, which was designed in pursuit of answers to these four questions. In Chapter 2, I provide an in-depth discussion of the foundational literatures that informed this project, including research based on Bronfenbrenner's (1999) bioecological model, research on attitudes and attitude development, and studies of perceptions of teachers. In Chapter 3, I describe my research methodology, including sampling and recruitment procedures, development and implementation of the interview protocol, data collection and analytic procedures, and trustworthiness measures. In Chapter 4, I provide findings from my analyses, including an overview of the types of attitudes participants described, the contexts/interactions in which they perceived these attitudes, how they interpreted or responded to perceived attitudes, and how their perceptions varied across a number of bioecological and sociocultural contexts. Chapter 5 contains my discussion, including a description of study limitations, practical implications of my findings, and directions for future research on teachers' perceptions of attitudes toward teaching.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

This research is not based on a single central construct. Thus, an empirical foundation will be established through consideration of several related constructs that informed the study overall. For each construct or perspective, I review literatures that are theoretically relevant to this study, beginning with Bronfenbrenner's (1999) bioecological model of development. Next, the foundational and recent literature on attitudes is discussed. Finally, perceptions of teachers are addressed through the teacher status and professionalization literatures. In reviewing these literatures, I came to understand that gender has played a prominent role in shaping existing perceptions of teaching. As such, the intersection between gender and each construct is addressed within their respective subsections.

### THE BIOECOLOGICAL MODEL

When Bronfenbrenner published his landmark work on ecological systems theory (1979), he argued that it would allow for a broader understanding of the individual within her/his *ecology*, which was composed of many contexts that would change across the lifespan. The model also posited that concentric *ecosystems* (i.e., micro-, meso-, exo-, and macrosystems) would continually influence the individual at all times. Bronfenbrenner argued that, unlike experimental research, which was highly rigorous but rarely applicable to the real world, naturalistic observation considering these four systems could provide as much valid empirical data as experimental designs while maintaining focus on individuals in the real world.

Bronfenbrenner's determination to represent the complexity of the real world inspired continuous revisions of his own theory. Whereas the ecological systems model had emphasized the developmental influence of the environment on the individual, the

bioecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1999) brought the individual actor to the fore through examination of processes and personal characteristics (Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield, & Karnik, 2009). *Processes* referred to the activities/actions of the individual, and *proximal processes* were those activities that influenced individual development. To qualify as proximal, a process had to meet five criteria: (a) the individual had to engage in the activity; (b) the activity had to be undertaken fairly regularly over a span of time; (c) the activity had to become “increasingly more complex” (Bronfenbrenner, 1999, p. 6) by virtue of its regularity and continuity; (d) the activity had to involve interaction between the individual and a person, object, or symbol; and (e) the activity had to be reciprocal in nature.

According to the bioecological model, processes were thought to be shaped by environmental contexts and characteristics of the developing individual; and the combination of processes (one’s own or someone else’s), context, and personal characteristics would yield some developmental outcome that would manifest as a new personal characteristic. For instance, Lin (2016) investigated how teachers’ process of storytelling affected Taiwanese preschoolers’ development of resilience. However, Lin recognized that the relationship between the teacher’s processes and student resilience was shaped by the students’ home and school contexts as well as their personal characteristics. In the case of one focal child, Grace, the impact of the teacher’s storytelling was enhanced by many contextual elements (e.g., closeness with parents and grandparents, positive school climate). However, Grace possessed some personal characteristics that enhanced (i.e., academic motivation and average intelligence) or inhibited (i.e., lack of confidence) the effects of the teacher’s storytelling processes on her development of resilience.

The bioecological model has been invoked widely as a theoretical framework in recent research on children, teaching, and learning. For instance, Peterson et al. (2016) compared principals’ and teachers’ ratings of teacher professionalism in preschools across

Finland, Sweden, Estonia, and Hungary. The belief that “professionalism of early childhood teachers must consider not only the individual teacher, but also the relationships and environments that influence who the professional is as a person” (p. 138) drew Peterson and her colleagues to Bronfenbrenner’s framework. Six teacher processes (i.e., interaction, involvement with families, planning for instruction and assessment of development, teaching strategies, engagement in professional development, establishment of a growth environment, and development of values) served as the focal determinants of professionalism (person-level outcome). However, in line with Bronfenbrenner’s later models (1999, 2005), the impact of these processes was influenced by the “interaction between a teacher’s [personal characteristics], her immediate community environment, and the societal landscape” (p. 138).

Peterson et al. found that the impact of processes varied across local and national contexts. For instance, there was a statistically significant negative association between teacher-child ratio (contextual factor) and process ratings for “child interactions, less restrictive teacher behavior, and children engaging in more complex language interactions and play” (p. 148), all of which were central factors in assessing the overall professionalism of a preschool teacher. Although this finding is somewhat intuitive, the bioecological approach provided a framework that clarified the impact of a single contextual factor, teacher-child ratio, on teachers’ overall professionalism rating in terms of indirect causality and mediation due to context.

Shea, Wang, Shi, Gonzalez, and Espelage (2016) used the bioecological framework to organize and analyze data they obtained from focus groups on “perspectives of teachers and parents of elementary school-aged Asian and Latino immigrant children on school bullying” (p. 83). Based on their conversations with parents and teachers, they developed a moderated mediation model in which parent/teacher intervention appeared to mediate the

existing effect of parents'/teachers' beliefs about the definition and causes of bullying on "propensity and impact of their children's involvement in bullying" (p. 91). However, acculturative stress appeared to moderate the relationship between parents'/teachers' beliefs about bullying and their tendency to intervene.

In a review and critique of recent research that had claimed to be based on the bioecological model, Tudge et al. (2009) noted, "The meaning of theory in any scientific field is to provide a framework within which to explain connections among the phenomena under study and to provide insights leading to the discovery of new concepts" (p. 198). In designing the interview protocol and analyzing each participants' data, I concentrated on identifying the traits of the individual participant, the processes that they described, and the context of said processes in an effort to understand how together, these elements inform teachers' interpretations of others' attitudes toward teachers and the teaching profession. Particular attention was paid to contextual differences between Massachusetts and Texas, and how those differences related to the processes that appeared to shape their perceptions of attitudes toward teaching.

### **Influence of the Exosystem: A Two-State Comparison**

Interview data typically reflect a great deal about participants' personal experiences and immediate surroundings, what Bronfenbrenner (1979; 1999; 2005) would consider the micro- and mesosystems. Researchers often struggle, however, to obtain empirical data on broader systems, specifically *exosystems*, which "encompass the immediate setting in which [a] person is found...[and] indirectly influence development by altering, defining, and/or prescribing what takes place in a given setting (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 514). According to Tudge et al. (2009), the exosystem is a particularly "important [context] in which the individuals whose development is being considered [is] not actually situated but

which have important indirect influences on their development” (p. 201). Thus, it was important to examine differences in personal experiences and perceptions across exosystems, including large institutions, both formal and informal, “as they operate at a concrete local level” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 514). For the present study, the exosystem was of particular interest as it includes structures such as the media, government agencies (from local to federal), and “informal social networks” (p. 514), all of which are potential sources informing the development of attitudes toward teachers (Hoyle, 2001).

The abstract and overarching nature of exosystems can interfere with one’s ability to see how such institutions indirectly influence personal outcomes. In an effort to examine contextual differences at the level of the exosystem, I sampled teachers from Texas and Massachusetts, states with distinct political and governmental structures that inform their management of, approaches to, and Discourse around public education. Through this approach, I aimed to capture some of the influences situated within the exosystem that shape and control teachers’ more immediate contexts.

Texas and Massachusetts were selected as juxtaposable exosystems in light of their vastly divergent approaches to public education which may inform attitudes toward any discourse around teaching. Of particular interest were differences in educational policies that shape teachers’ immediate local environments, and differences in distribution of influence among policy-making structures, or what Marshall, Mitchell, and Wirt (1984) call *assumptive worlds*. In terms of these constructs, regional ideological and relational norms unique to each of the two states may represent distinct causes and effects of localized attitudes toward teaching (Erikson, 2004). In the following section, I overview a number of pertinent differences between Texas and Massachusetts, first in terms of policies and regulations and then in terms of assumptive worlds.

### ***Policy Differences***

Even a cursory comparison of the educational regulations and policies between Texas and Massachusetts reveals an array of large-scale differences reflective of a broad political/ideological divide. In this section, I provide a brief overview of four policy/regulatory issues on which these states differ.

#### ***Charter Regulations***

State legislators in Texas and Massachusetts have taken different approaches in integrating charter schools in their respective educational environments. Massachusetts has a cap limiting the number of charter schools in the state to 120 (Questions and Answers, 2015), although currently there are only 78 charters operating in the state. In Texas, there are 629 charter campuses (Texas Education Agency, 2016a; TEA) and that number grows annually. Although the population of Texas is more than four times that of Massachusetts, Texas has roughly eight times as many charter schools.

It is difficult to infer precisely what this difference says about attitudes toward teaching, or about public school teachers' perceptions of others' attitudes, but it does suggest that the legislature and the voters in Massachusetts claim an ideological position that is protective of traditional public schools (as evidenced by the rejection of a 2016 referendum to increase the number of charters in the state) which, unlike charter schools, must hire teachers who have been licensed by the state. Conversely, in Texas the prevailing ideology is open to semi-public solutions, public-private partnerships, and allowing competition and choice to "raise all ships" in light of the perception that public schools (and the teachers therein) may not be the most effective educational option of all students.

#### ***Unionization***

The topic of teachers' unions is somewhat polarizing in general, particularly in light of the active role of the National Educators Association and American Federation of



Teachers as political lobbying groups. Each state also has its own teachers' unions, although perceptions and influence of unions vary. Winkler, Scull, and Zeehandelaar (2012) evaluated the power of each state's teachers' unions based on 37 variables related to resources/membership, political involvement, scope of collective bargaining, state policies, and perceived political influence. According to their report, Massachusetts had a fairly strong union (ranked 21 out of 50), but its strength came primarily from collective bargaining rights, resources and membership, and *perceived* influence. The teachers' unions in Texas, on the other hand, have been weakened by state statutes prohibiting collective bargaining (Collective Bargaining, 1993) and labor strikes (Prohibition on Strikes, 1993), along with a right-to-work law that makes it illegal to require teachers (or other employees) to join a union (Right-to-Work, 1993). It follows logically that Texas union membership and resources would be lower (ranked 44 out of 50) in light of these limitations. However, the Texas unions were ranked four spots above Massachusetts in terms of *actual* involvement in politics (36 out of 50). Yet, *perceived* influence of the Texas teachers' unions was ranked 34 out of 50, while Massachusetts teachers' unions were sixteenth in the nation.

Once again, it is difficult to infer exact causes or effects of these discrepancies, but it is clear that despite a fairly negligible difference in actual political influence, members of the Massachusetts teachers' unions perceive themselves to be more powerful, and perhaps more well-respected by state policymaking bodies than do the members of the Texas teachers' unions. Whether or not this reflects anything about how teachers perceive the prevailing attitudes toward their occupation remains to be seen.

### *Teacher Tenure*

As a result of the collective bargaining power afforded to teachers' unions in Massachusetts, all public school teachers in the state, upon meeting specific criteria, are

eligible for tenure (although not all are granted such tenure). In Texas, teachers typically are offered annual renewable 187-day contracts without the possibility of long-term tenure (Teacher tenure, 2014). The fact that teachers are not eligible for tenure in Texas may impact attitudes toward teaching positively, as tenure is often criticized for protecting ineffective teachers and ultimately limiting the success of schools (Coleman, Schroth, Molinaro, & Green, 2005; Loeb, Miller, & Wyckoff, 2015; McGee & Block, 1991). On the other hand, it is possible that voters and elected officials continue to support tenure in Massachusetts out of respect for the work that teachers do. Any speculation about a relationship between state tenure laws and regional attitudes toward teachers would be vain in the absence of purposefully collected data on the issue. However, the stark differences in the management of teachers' professional lives certainly suggests that teachers may occupy different status positions in Texas and Massachusetts.

### *Licensure*

Another notable difference exists in teacher licensure requirements, including the fact that Massachusetts offers a professional license that is earned after an individual has taught for three years and either completed a masters' degree or a Master Teacher Status Program (Teacher license types, 2017). In Texas, the initial license, which can be earned through completion of an undergraduate teacher preparation program or through a one-year certification program after completing a bachelor's degree, is the ultimate level of licensure (Certification, 2017). Texas' licensure structure assumes that there is a minimum level of proficiency required to become a teacher, and that once the minimum proficiency has been achieved, no further licensing is necessary, although continuing professional development is required. Conversely, in Massachusetts the need to earn professional licensure through additional training and classroom experience may create an overall image of teaching as a career in which individuals advance over time by pursuing their own improvement.

### *Assumptive Worlds*

The previously mentioned educational policy differences between Texas and Massachusetts are indicative perhaps of differences in *assumptive worlds*, or “social reality that is taken for granted” (Antonio, 1972, p. 297). In terms of educational policymaking, what is taken for granted is the distribution of decision making power around education legislation (Marshall, Mitchell, & Wirt, 1984). In an effort to make assumptive worlds visible and explicit, Marshall et al. (1984) strove to “identify the relative power and influence of various state education policy groups” and how the “configurations of power differ among the states” (p. 347). By interviewing members of 18 state policy mechanisms (SPM) from six states, and by administering an instrument on which SPMs were ranked based on the participants’ “perceptions of level of influence on policymaking from 1982 to 1985” (p. 349), Marshall et al. were able to represent, compare, and analyze important differences in the power structures surrounding education policymaking.

Drastic differences between the rankings from state to state illustrated ideological differences about whose expertise was most valuable and important when it came to educational policy. In Illinois, Wisconsin, and California, for instance, *teachers’ organizations* were ranked as the first, second, and fourth most powerful SPMs respectively. In Arizona, on the other hand, *teachers’ organizations* ranked 12th, whereas *non-education interest groups* ranked fifth. This is particularly telling in light of the fact that *non-education interest groups* ranked 14th overall when the six states were combined, and outside of Arizona *non-education interest groups* were not ranked higher than tenth. In Arizona, however, *non-education interest groups* were perceived to have more influence over educational policy than *federal mandates* and even outranked *all combined educational interest groups* (e.g., *state administrators’ organization*, *chief state school office*, *teachers’ organizations*). These marked differences speak to the way that

assumptive worlds regarding education policymaking map onto exosystems, as they represent “contexts in which [teachers] are not actually situated but which have important indirect influences on their development” (Tudge et al., 2009, p. 201) through their influence on school contexts and regulations on teaching.

Marshall et al.’s (1986) depiction of assumptive worlds informed the current study by illustrating how the exosystemic context, particularly education policymaking, shapes the lived experiences of public school teachers differently from state to state. However, since the passage of No Child Left Behind and Race to Top, federal oversight has tempered state control over public education. In light of the most recent election and the proposed educational policies described by the current administration, however, power over education policy likely will shift back to the states, making differences in exosystemic contexts especially influential in terms of their impact on schools and teachers. By comparing data from Texas and Massachusetts, I aimed to capture associations that may exist between exosystemic contexts and teachers’ perceptions of others’ attitudes toward teaching.

## **ATTITUDE DEVELOPMENT**

Gordon Allport (1935) often is credited as the father of modern attitude research in part for critiquing and synthesizing an array of disparate definitions of *attitudes* from a number of different disciplines in order to create an inclusive definition: “An attitude is a mental and neural state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence upon the individual’s response to all objects and situation with which it is related” (p. 810). The breadth of his definition recognized important congruencies between phenomena such as stereotyping and stigma, physical attraction, and even aesthetic taste, each of which includes evaluations that inform reactions to people or

objects. An attitude toward teaching would involve evaluations of any number of domains/criteria that would in turn shape individuals' reactions to teachers and teaching-related miscellany. Such an attitude could manifest in voting patterns, in decisions about where to send children to school, or in how one interacts with teachers.

Allport (1935) identified four primary mechanisms by which attitudes develop. The first was what he called *integration*, or generalization resulting from repeated exposure. Typically, exposure leads to positive attitudes (Winkielman, Schwarz, Fazendeiro, & Reber, 2003; Zajonc, 2001). For instance, in terms to racial attitudes, "intergroup contact typically reduces intergroup prejudice" (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006, p. 751). In addition to mere exposure (Zajonc, 1968), a second mechanism by which attitudes develop is *individuation* (also called *differentiation* and *segregation*), which was thought to originate in infants' positive and negative reactions to items in the world around them. The theory of individuation, as Allport (1935) described it, asserted that infants' initial impressions became sustained attitudes as they matured. The third means by which attitudes develop was *trauma*. The associations between the trauma and attitudes are not always intuitive, such as Broman's (2010) finding that "suffering trauma is related to more accepting attitudes concerning sexuality" (p. 351). The complexity of trauma-derived attitudes can also vary on personal characteristics, as Broman found that attitudes concerning sexuality varied according to the gender of the traumatized individual. The final mechanism for attitude formation was the human tendency to imitate and adopt the attitudes of loved or respected others (e.g., parents, peers, role models). This can be seen in Deater-Deckard, Lansford, Dodge, Pettit, and Bates (2003) longitudinal study of adolescents' attitudes toward corporal punishment, which established that "adolescents who had been spanked by their own mothers were more approving of this discipline method" (p. 351). I was

interested particularly in this form of attitude development as it pertains to the current study.

A great deal has been learned about the formation and function of attitudes since Allport began writing on the topic, and the influence of his early writings can be seen in more recent research on attitudes that informed the present study. For instance, researchers have found that when asked about “sensitive” issues, most notably race, participants refused to express overt attitudes for fear of saying something that may be viewed as socially unacceptable (Berinsky 1999; Berinsky 2004; Tourangeau, Rips, & Rasinski, 2000). Although expressing attitudes toward teaching is not controversial or risky in the ways that expressing racial attitudes may be, it is possible that norms about propriety, politeness, and face (Goffman, 1955; Spencer-Oatey, 2002) may shape the way that individuals, particularly in conversation *with* teachers, express their attitudes toward teaching. If, in interacting with teachers, individuals express explicitly what they perceive to be appropriate attitude toward teaching, but withhold elements of their authentic attitudes, they are likely to exhibit verbal and nonverbal indicators of inauthenticity (Grice, 1975). In light of the human tendency to “orient presumptions about each other’s intentions in what they say and do” (Brown, 1995, p. 53), teachers may interpret others’ statements as indicating a variety of possible intentions, positions, and attitudes toward teaching, which could both inform and result from a range of perceptions about others’ attitudes toward teaching.

### **Gender Stereotyping and the Feminization of Teaching**

Extensive research has examined attitudes toward women and femininity, and the body of literature on the feminization of teaching is ample as well (e.g., Carrington, 2002; Cortina, San Román, & San Román, 2006; Cushman, 2005). The fact that “people organize

their images of occupations in a highly stereotyped, socially learned manner” and largely along gender-lines (Glick, Wilt, & Perrault, 1995, p. 566) is one of the central phenomena shaping perceptions of teaching worldwide. In light of the emphasis on attitudes in the current study, a series of three studies published between 1975 and 2006 will be offered as a representation of the type of research that has examined gender-based occupational stereotypes (or *gendertypes*) with a particular focus on the persistence of the feminine gendertype of teaching over time.

The intensity and prevalence of gender stereotypes related to teaching necessarily correspond with assumptions about what the occupation requires, and what traits or abilities allow teachers to be effective. This includes the presumption that women are better equipped to be teachers due to a biological predisposition to be nurturers (Cavanagh, 2007), which is believed to endow them with characteristics such as patience and compassion (Adams, 1971). Conversely, men who become teachers “have been variously depicted as ‘unusual’, ‘ambitious’, ‘odd’ or even ‘deviant’” (Carrington, 2002, p. 287) for selecting an occupation that is thought to require “feminine” predispositions. Cushman (2005) found in her study of male primary school teachers that “[few] career aspirants are disposed to such emotive reactions from other people as males who disclose their decision to pursue a career as a primary schoolteacher” (p. 321). Male graduate students preparing to become teachers reported that they anticipated accusations of pedophilia and homosexuality would come with careers in primary education (Carrington, 2002). Clearly for men and women alike, stereotypical attitudes about gender and teaching are inseparable.

Shinar (1975), building on existing research connecting occupational tasks and gender-stereotypical traits, conducted the first of many studies that examined explicit occupational gendertypes by asking participants to rate 129 occupations on a scale from masculine (1) to feminine (7). Participants in one group were asked to indicate for each

occupation whether their rating was informed by (a) “the proportion of men and women employed in the occupation”; (b) “personality traits matching the occupation”; (c) “physical capabilities required for the occupation”; or (d) other (p. 101). In a second group, instructions called for ratings to be based on participants’ perceptions of the proportions of men and women populating each occupation. Participants in this group were given more specific language for rating occupations (e.g., “occupations in which the number of men is much greater than that of women can be called a masculine occupation”; p. 101). A third group was told that ratings should be based on the gender attributes associated with each occupation (e.g., “occupations typified by predominantly feminine traits can be called feminine occupations,” p. 102).

Of the 129 occupations, only nine were rated “more feminine” than *elementary school teacher* (mean = 5.583, SD = 0.447); and only two (*manicurist* and *registered nurse*) had smaller standard deviations (0.242 and 0.265 respectively), indicating that elementary teaching was perceived as extremely feminine and that there was little variation in that perception across the sample. *High school teacher* was the 28th most feminine, but ultimately was rated as gender-neutral (mean = 4.00, SD = 0.118). Educational administrative occupations (i.e., *school principal*; *educational administrator*) were ranked as slightly masculine (3.083 and 3.250 respectively), as were all higher education teaching positions, which varied according to specialization. *Law professors* were seen as the eighth most masculine (2.583), whereas *humanities professors* were seen as only slightly masculine (3.667). According to Shinar (1975), the high level of agreement between male and female participants across three groups that used different criteria to rate the gender-association for occupations inspired “speculations about the nature of the relationship between these three kinds of stereotypic perceptions” (p. 108).



White et al. (1989) replicated Shinar's study in order to determine the consistency of occupational gender-types over time. They had been particularly interested in those gender associations that had been based on the proportion of men and women employed in each occupation because "less egalitarian traditions had persisted" (p. 289) since Shinar's (1975) data collection in spite of the fact that the proportions of women working in previously "masculine" fields had increased.

White et al.'s (1989) participants were randomly assigned to two groups, each of which was provided different criteria for rating the occupations: personality traits needed in the occupation for group one and the relative numbers of men and women employed in the occupation for group two. In line with Shinar's (1975) findings, responses from the two groups were highly correlated, suggesting that the different criteria did not affect responses. The overall range of ratings was narrower than Shinar's had been, indicating that occupational gender-typing overall had receded somewhat, yet there was little change in how teaching was perceived. In fact, only "three feminine [occupations] showed little or no change since 1979" (White et al., 1989, p. 296), including *elementary teaching*.

Whereas Shinar (1975) had included *high school teacher* as a single occupation in her original study, White et al. (1989) disaggregated secondary teaching into nine content specialties that elicited a range of gendertype ratings. The feminine specialties were *special education* (5.32), *art* (4.64), and *English* (4.74), whereas *math*, *social science*, *business*, *physical education*, *science*, and *vocational agriculture teachers* were all rated as masculine, ranging from 3.80 (math) to 3.04 (vocational agriculture). This more nuanced inspection of gendertyping for different types of secondary school teachers, which revealed important complexities in the idea of teaching as "women's work," would have been enhanced by asking a third group of participants to rate "high school teacher" as a single occupation. Would the mean of ratings for the nine teaching specialties have mirrored the

rating for “high school teacher” in general? The implications of such a comparison could have expanded the existing understanding of the attitudes toward teaching more broadly.

Building on the work of Shinar (1975) and White et al. (1989), White and White (2006) designed a more in-depth study of gender-stereotypes associated with three of the occupations that consistently had represented the feminine (*elementary teaching*), “neutral” (*accounting*), and masculine (*engineering*) domains. In a preliminary study, they asked undergraduates to list the first five words that came to mind when each of the occupations was presented. For each occupation, the five most-frequently listed words that did not appear on either of the other lists were selected as the “attributes” for each occupation. The resulting attributes of elementary teaching, “patience, creativity, children, caring, and storytime” (p. 261), provided remarkable evidence of the way that femininity and feminization shape attitudes toward elementary teaching in terms of what is required for one to excel in that field. Beyond the possible exception of creativity, the list of attributes contained two nouns that one would encounter as an elementary teacher (children and storytime) and two personality traits (patience and caring) that often are considered to be innate to women (Cavanagh, 2007). Research on creativity largely posits that it cannot be “taught” or “learned,” but that there is a universal capacity for creativity that can be honed (Stein, 2014). More often, however, individuals believe creativity to be endowed, innate to some but not others. Thus, the attributes of elementary teaching, absent any words related to training, education, or skill, point to an assumption that women, particularly creative women, make effective elementary teachers regardless of their knowledge, training, or skills. This aligns with findings from Glick, Wilt, and Perrault (1995) who reported that masculine personality traits (e.g., analytical, aggressive, mechanical) loaded strongly onto a factor of *prestige/intelligence*, whereas feminine personality traits (e.g., expressive, patient, cooperative) did not.

In addition to their examination of the attributes associated with masculine and feminine occupations, White and White (2006) compared their findings to Shinar's (1975) and White et al.'s (1989) gendertype ratings for *elementary teaching*, *engineering*, and *accounting*. Standardized scores of the ratings (1 = masculine; 7 = feminine) across the three studies were calculated as a means of determining whether the gendertyping of each occupation had changed over the 30-year period. They found that ratings for engineering had shifted from 1.9 to 2.3 between 1975 and 1989 ( $p < .05$ ), although the ratings did not change significantly between 1989 and 2006. Ratings for accounting had shifted significantly from 2.5 to 3.4 to 3.6 ( $p < .05$  for both shifts). However, there was no significant change in explicit gender stereotypes toward elementary teaching whatsoever (chronologically, 5.58, 5.46, and 5.60).

White and White (2006) also had participants take an Implicit-Associations Test (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995) designed to assess the presence and strength of implicitly held attitudes by measuring the speed and accuracy with which individuals were able to pair words with images in line with various sets of instructions. In this case, participants were asked to pair occupations (i.e., *elementary teacher*, *accountant*, *engineer*) with the "attributes" of each occupation and 20 first names (ten masculine and ten feminine). Interestingly, despite the statistically significant change in *explicit* gender attitudes toward accounting, and the fact that women outnumbered men in accounting at the time of the study, *implicit* gender attitudes toward accounting and engineering were fairly similar: heavily masculine, and more extreme than participants' explicit gendertypes. However, there was no such difference between implicit and explicit attitudes regarding elementary teaching as highly feminine.

In terms of the proposed study, this finding is crucial for two main reasons. For one, the results of White and White's (2006) IAT study indicated that it was common and

socially acceptable to stereotype elementary teaching as women's work requiring innately feminine traits; whereas participants' awareness of women's participation in engineering and accounting masked relatively strong implicit masculine gendertypes of those fields. In light of this, it is likely that individuals' explicit expressions of attitudes toward teaching will be fairly indicative of their implicit attitudes.

Additionally, this set of studies speak to the intransigence of gendered attitude toward teaching. This is troubling in light of what is known about attitude strength and resistance to attitudinal change. Specifically, strong attitudes are more likely to persist across time, they are more likely to predict behavior, and they affect information processing (Eagly & Chaikin, 1995). Perhaps the long history of and continuous exposure to female teachers has led to the strength of these gendertypical attitudes toward teaching, whereas exposure to and knowledge of engineers and accountants is sporadic if not rare, thereby allowing for more flexibility in attitudes toward those fields. Regardless of the specific mechanism by which teaching has become indelibly feminized, the strength of that specific attitude toward teaching does and will continue to color any and all discussions of how teaching is perceived.

Associations with femininity are not inherently negative, although there are indirect negative consequences of occupational gendertyping. For instance, gender imbalances in the workplace are self-reinforcing in that they "signal prospective employees that a job is or is not suitable for their own gender category" (Yoder & Schleicher, 1996, p. 174). This would not be concerning if there were high status/high salary occupations that were feminine gendertyped. In reality, however, "occupations inherently higher in status are more likely to be filled by men, perhaps because men seek higher status jobs than do women, and/or because women are denied access to higher status jobs" (Liben, Bigler, & Krogh, 2001, p. 348). Furthermore, ratings of masculine personality traits required for an

occupation are strongly associated with occupational prestige (Glick, Wilt, & Perrault, 1995). Therefore, in order for women to be successful in higher status occupations, they must possess or perform masculine traits. Unfortunately, Yoder and Schleicher (1996) found that individuals opted to distance themselves from women who exhibited gender-incongruent characteristics and “derogated them personally by regarding them as less likeable and attractive” (p. 184), and by calling their femininity into question. Put simply, highly educated women are forced to choose between high status jobs in which they will be derogated for performing in masculine ways or low status jobs like teaching for which they are believed to be naturally equipped, and for which they will receive little in the way of material compensation or professional respect. In subsequent sections, I expand on the impact of the gendertypical attitudes toward teaching as they pertain to occupational status and professionalization.

### **Perceptions of Others’ Attitudes**

The current study was not focused on revealing existing attitudes toward teaching, but rather on investigating what teachers perceive to be common attitudes toward teaching, and how teachers experience and interpret these attitudes. This aim is in line with the work of social psychologists who have moved beyond studying the development and function of individuals’ attitudes, seeking instead to understand how individuals understand and are affected by others’ attitudes toward them. Constructs such as stereotype threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995) and stigma consciousness (Pinel, 1999) describe how an individual’s perception of and reaction to others’ attitudes toward her/him affect her/his psychological processes, decisions, and behavior. The present study was inspired largely by the continuing research on these constructs, which have provided substantial evidence that

thinking and behavior are impacted when an individual is made aware that she/he is the object of stereotypical and stigmatizing attitudes.

### ***Stereotype Threat***

In 1995, Steele and Aronson published their initial studies on *stereotype threat*, which they defined as “the risk of confirming, as self-characteristic, a negative stereotype about one’s group” (p. 797). The first of four studies, as an example of the experimental manipulations they used to reveal stereotype threat effects, included three groups, each containing Black and White college students who were told to complete a brief section of the GRE Verbal Exam. Black students in the experimental group, who had been informed that the test was a measure of intelligence, were outperformed significantly by the White students in their group. The same was true for Black students in the “challenge group,” who had been told “to view the difficult test as a challenge” (p. 799). However, students in the “nondiagnostic group,” who had been told that they were to complete a “problem-solving task,” scored similarly regardless of race. Steele and Aronson (1995) took this as evidence of a possible stereotype threat response:

With SAT difference statistically controlled, Black participants performed worse than White participants when the test was presented as a measure of their ability, but improved dramatically, matching the performance of Whites, when the test was presented as less reflective of ability (p. 801).

In other words, through the language of the instructions in the experimental and challenge groups, Black students had been reminded of existing stereotypes about African-Americans’ intellectual and verbal inferiority, and this made them vulnerable to the possibility of typifying that stereotype if they did not perform well. For the nondiagnostic group, the absence of language associated with stereotypes of African-Americans allowed

Black students to proceed without being triggered to think about stereotypes or the possibility of epitomizing them.

Through the use of similar manipulations, Steele and Aronson (1995) identified a number of effects that appeared when Black students were primed to think about existing negative stereotypes of African-Americans and therefore recognize in their conditions the threat of validating those negative stereotypes. In a particularly telling iteration of the experiment, Black students who were asked to provide racial demographics before completing a verbal test performed significantly worse than White students who were asked to provide the same information, whereas Black students who were not asked to identify their race, and therefore were not primed into a state of stereotype threat, performed equally to White students in their group.

In another version of the manipulation, Black students who had been told that they were going to complete a test of verbal ability (diagnostic group) were less likely than Black students in the nondiagnostic group to indicate their race on a post-test questionnaire, with only a quarter electing to identify as Black. Although their reasons for omitting that information cannot be known definitively, the comparative willingness of Black students in the nondiagnostic group to disclose their race certainly suggests that Black students in the diagnostic group did not want their race associated with their performance on the diagnostic measure for fear of validating negative stereotypes about African Americans' verbal abilities.

This fear was reflected similarly in findings from another condition in which Black students in the diagnostic (intelligence test) group answered fewer questions than did Black students in the nondiagnostic (problem-solving task) group. Black students in the diagnostic group also took longer to answer questions than any other participants of either race, potentially in response to the additional pressure to avoid confirming negative

stereotypes about African Americans that had been brought to mind through the language of “intelligence testing.”

Inspired by Steele and Aronson’s (1995) work, researchers went on to identify stereotype threat responses that impacted women’s math performance (O’Brien & Crandall, 2003; Spencer, Steele, & Quinn, 1999), working memory for Latinx students and for women (Schmader & Johns, 2003), overall educational outcomes for Latinx students (Guyll, Madon, Prieto, & Scherr, 2010) and much else (see Spencer, Logel, & Davies, 2016 for a recent review). As it turned out, even White men could become vulnerable to stereotype threat. According to Aronson et al. (1999), “stereotype threat requires neither a history of stigmatization nor internalized feelings of intellectual inferiority” (p. 29) as long as an individual is made aware of existing stereotypes that paint the “other” as somehow superior.

In testing this hypothesis, Aronson et al. (1999) replicated typical stereotype threat manipulations (Steele & Aronson, 1995), and selected as focal participants White male students from Stanford who had indicated that math was important to them, that they were good at math, or that they had scored in the upper percentiles on the SAT math exam. Half of those students were assigned to an experimental condition in which they were told that the goal of the research was to understand better why Asian students continually outperformed White students in math, and the participants were asked to read a series of short articles on Asian students’ math abilities before completing a short math assessment. Participants in this experimental group scored significantly lower than those in the control group, to whom Asian students had not been mentioned whatsoever. According to responses on the post-test questionnaire, participants in the experimental group exerted significantly more effort on answering questions correctly than did their counterparts in the control group.



Taken together, the body of work on stereotype threat illustrates how conscious awareness of existing stereotypes, whether they refer to one's own identity group as inferior or to a different identity group as superior, inhibit cognition and working memory, heighten feelings of self-doubt, and invoke a form of motivation that seems to diminish ability and performance.

### ***Stigma Consciousness***

Drawing on stereotype threat research, Pinel (1999) set out to determine whether “targets [of stigmatizing attitudes] differ in the extent to which they expect to be stereotyped by others” (p. 114). She attributed such differences to a construct she termed *stigma consciousness*, or the extent to which a member of a stigmatized identity group expects to be stereotyped. Within any given stigmatized identity group, levels of stigma consciousness will vary based on individuals' personal experiences with and first-hand exposure to stereotyping and discrimination based on their own identity group membership. For instance, in a study of stigma consciousness among gay men and lesbians, Pinel (1999) recognized that gay men in general scored higher than lesbians on the Stigma Consciousness Questionnaire (SCQ; 1999), which Pinel attributed to the fact that gay men were more likely than lesbians to face prejudice and harassment. Thus, the relatively higher stigma consciousness scores among gay men were taken as evidence of the fact that “groups that regularly confront discrimination should have higher levels of stigma consciousness than groups that do not” (p. 124).

The powerful influence of lived experiences with stigmatization and discrimination is also thought to explain much of the variability in stigma consciousness within an identity group, as the amount of prejudice an individual has experienced may be context-dependent. For instance, individuals from stigmatized identity groups typically witnessed

discrimination more often at the group-level than the person-level (Taylor, Wright, & Porter, 1994). Thus, when asked to list examples of gender discrimination at the group- and personal-level, women low in stigma consciousness listed far more group-level examples than personal-level examples. Conversely, among women who were high in stigma consciousness, the gap between the number of group- and personal-level examples was far smaller. This finding supported Pinel's (1999) assertion that stigma consciousness will be stronger among individuals who have had or are able to recall more specific instances of person-level discrimination and stigmatization.

Following Pinel's (1999) original study, more recent research has focused on the effects of high/low stigma consciousness on the thoughts, behavior, and mental and physical health of members of stigmatized groups. For instance, Son and Shelton (2011) found that higher levels of stigma consciousness inhibited Asian-American college students from interacting with their White roommates, and even drove them to spend less time in their dorms. Link and Phelan (2016), in working with individuals with mental illness, found there to be a significant negative correlation between stigma consciousness and self-esteem, presumably due to the greater frequency with which individuals became aware of the existing stigma related to mental illness. Orom, Sharma, Homish, Underwood, and Homish (2016) found that among men who identified as people of color, "greater [racial] stigma consciousness was associated with greater odds of having hypertension" (n.p.), whereas increased stigma consciousness in White men actually correlated with lower systolic blood pressure. Orom and her colleagues (2016) concluded that their "findings for stigma consciousness suggest that anticipatory vigilance may be impacting minority health" (n.p.). Another health risk associated with stigma consciousness came from Schmalz and Colistra (2016), who found that, among individuals in a weight management program, weight-based stigma consciousness was strongly and negatively

associated with body esteem, which was one of the most powerful predictors of an individual's increased perceptions of barriers to weight loss ( $r = -0.39, p = .001$ ).

Stigma consciousness was a central construct in the formulation of the current study, yet it would not be appropriate to examine stigma consciousness among teachers. The present study presupposes that teachers are conscious of certain sets of attitudes that commonly are ascribed to teaching, but the attitudes in question do not rise to the level of stigma. Therefore, in orienting this study, *stigma consciousness* served as a powerful example of the ways that one's awareness and perception of others' attitudes can influence one's own thinking, behavior, and physical and emotional well-being.

## **PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHING**

In some respects, a great deal is already known about perceptions of teaching as an occupation. However, the bodies of existing research on this topic rely almost exclusively on questionnaires and surveys about status and professionalization. A great deal has been written on these constructs as they apply to teachers, but I argue that they provide a somewhat limited perspective on how teaching is viewed, and they make little effort at understanding the underlying attitudes that inform more formalized evaluations of teaching as an occupation. The status and professionalization literatures are valuable nonetheless in what they reveal about explicit evaluations of teaching relative to other occupations, and about the relatively static position of teaching within various occupational hierarchies. In the following section, I provide overviews of the foundational and recent literatures on teacher status and professionalization, both of which necessarily include discussions of gender and the ways in which status and professionalization are withheld from teaching due to gendertyping. I conclude by explaining how a bioecological approach

(Bronfenbrenner, 1999) can advance the existing understanding of how teachers and teaching are perceived.

### **Teacher Status: Occupational Status, Prestige, and Esteem**

Within fields such as sociology, economics, and social theory, the term *status* has taken on myriad definitions that overlap with one another in various ways. Hoyle (2001), who stands as a preeminent voice on the status of teaching, recognized that the broad construct of *status* could be more precisely defined through the extraction of three distinct, constituent sub-constructs: status, prestige, and esteem. In order to prevent confusion stemming from Hoyle's use of "status" in denoting the broad construct as well as one of its constituent parts, I will refer to the broad construct of *Status* through the use of a capital letter S, and the constituent sub-construct will be spelled using the lower case (*status*).

#### ***Occupational Status***

The status afforded to teaching has remained remarkably stable over time (Hoyle, 1999), and relatively low. According to Hoyle (2001), *occupational status* refers to "a category to which knowledgeable groups allocate a particular occupation" (p. 144). This results in assignment to discrete categories such as "white collar" or "blue collar," or by imposition of labels like "professional," or in the case of teaching, "semi-professional" (Etzioni, 1969). Regardless of the particular title, occupational status is intended to divide occupations into high, middle, and low status groups by virtue of socioeconomic standing and formal educational demands.

In terms of socioeconomic status (SES), teachers tend to fit into the middle group. Starting salaries for teachers are commensurate with those of other occupations that require similar levels of education and expertise, although teachers' salaries increase at a far slower rate with a far lower ceiling. As a result, there is little opportunity for economic growth for

teachers. There is little doubt that this keeps the overall status of teaching lower than it would be if formal education was the only criterion under consideration. The status differential between elementary and secondary teaching would vanish also if SES/salary was the only criterion for assessing status. However, it is the importance of formal education in determining occupational status that may explain the “distinct status hierarchy within the teaching occupation” (Ingersoll, 2011, p. 194) across grade levels and content areas.

Johnston, McKeown, and McEwen (1999) attributed the hierarchical organization within teaching to the notion that “women are seen to be better suited to working with younger children because they are more nurturing” (Carrington, 2002, p. 289). This biological justification for the feminization of elementary teaching implies that education and training are irrelevant, or at least less necessary, for elementary teaching. Conversely, the presumption that secondary teaching requires specialized content-area knowledge that must be attained through additional academic preparation elevates the status of secondary teaching. Furthermore, the biological explanation for the feminization of elementary teaching, by assuming an evolutionary perspective, removes agency and autonomy from elementary teaching. This perspective supposes that “nurturing” is the primary task of an elementary teacher, and that women’s nurturing ability is instinctual or genetic, not honed, studied, or practiced.

### ***Occupational Prestige***

*Prestige* can be understood as “the approval and respect members of society give to incumbents of occupations as rewards for their valuable services to society” (Ganzeboom, De Graaf, & Treiman, 1992, p. 8). An occupational prestige rating is based on an individual’s amalgamated knowledge, beliefs, and/or feelings about the occupation

in question, and is therefore inherently continuous (Goldthorpe, 2016), unlike the discrete categories for *status*. It can be difficult to interpret many prestige studies, however, because participants are often “shown a list of occupations and asked how much prestige each job possesses” (Pollack, 2014, n.p.) without being provided specific criteria for assessment. This lack of operationalization has made it difficult for researchers, policy makers, economists, and health professionals to make practical meaning of the body of existing literature (Diallo, Zurn, Gupta, & Dal Poz, 2003).

Interestingly, despite the inconsistent and vague use of the term *prestige*, and “[r]egardless of the form of the question and the mode of response, essentially the same ranking will be obtained” (Hauser and Warren, 1997, p. 11) across samples and across time (Hoyle, 2008; Treiman, 1977). In fact, Hauser (1982) found prestige ranking throughout the 19th and 20th centuries to be highly correlated. Thus, “[the] relatively invariant character of prestige suggests that the possibility of teaching enhancing its relative prestige is remote” (Hoyle, 2008, p. 297). However, teachers actually rate fairly well in terms of prestige and are a highly educated population (Country notes, 2014), yet teaching is one of “[m]any common occupations...held by women [that] do not fit the typical relationships among prestige, education, and earnings” (Hauser & Warren, 1997, n.p.). Ample evidence within the esteem and professionalism literatures, which will be discussed in subsequent sections, speaks to the ways that the feminization of teaching mitigates the typical prestige-pay relationship.

### ***Occupational Esteem***

*Occupational esteem* is the “regard in which an occupation is held by the general public by virtue of the personal qualities which members are perceived as bringing to their core task” (Hoyle, 2001, p. 147). Interestingly, esteem is “the only facet of [*Status*] that

teachers can influence themselves” (Hargreaves, 2009, p. 266) due to the fact that esteem ratings are more sensitive than prestige or status to contextual and interactional factors (Hoyle, 2001). Put differently, ratings for *prestige* and *esteem* are both evaluative and subjective in nature. However, *prestige* positions occupations within generalized rank-order hierarchies, whereas *esteem* evaluates quality in terms of dedication, competence, and care (Hargreaves, 2009). An individual’s evaluation of these characteristics will be heavily influenced by her/his past interactions with teachers as well as second-hand accounts of others’ interactions with teachers and teaching.

Despite their subjective nature, esteem evaluations of teaching and other helping occupations are highly consistent and based on a narrow set of criteria. Coxon, Davies, and Jones (1986) recognized this when participants engaging in a think aloud protocols were instructed to sort 32 “occupations into as many or as few groups as they wished” in order to determine which occupations were perceived to “go naturally together” (p. 122). Helping occupations (i.e., secondary school teacher, primary school teacher, social worker, male psychiatric nurse, minister of religion, and eye surgeon) clustered together and were held in high esteem based on participants’ perceptions that individuals working in these occupations were highly dedicated and caring. Participants also grouped these occupations together based on the assumption that individuals go into these fields for personal fulfilment and not for material reward. Coxon et al. (1986) found that “these two characteristics, service orientation and intrinsic reward,” were the sole definitional criteria of the helping occupations, and theorized that this overly simplistic conception of helping occupations may explain why salaries for teachers and other helping occupations remain low despite their high prestige and esteem ratings.

## Teacher Professionalization

Early research on the sociology of professions was credited with developing the language and criteria that have become the fundamental basis for discussion of professionalism/professionalization, and more recently for defining “the criteria for critiquing the dominating traditions that it had itself contributed to create” (Krejsler, 2005, p. 336). The field was founded in part on the belief that the general public possessed an overly simplistic conception of what allowed an individual to succeed as a lawyer or a scientist or any other professional pursuit. There was concern that this misunderstanding led professional proficiency to be taken for granted and for professions to be viewed as mere “handmaidens of economic interest” (Parson, 1939, p. 457). In response, Parsons (1939) and his contemporaries, who were struck by the constancy of professions throughout modern human history, sought to compare and differentiate the professions and “study...the institutional framework within which professional activities are carried out [in order to] understand the nature and function” (p. 457) of professions in society.

Within the sociology of professions arose an interest in professionalism, which “focuses on the question of what qualifications and acquired capacities, what competence is required for the successful exercise of an occupation” (Englund, 1996, p. 76). According to Abbott (2014), *occupational control* is the primary characteristic distinguishing professional from nonprofessional occupations, and the ability to manage one’s own work through independent thought is therefore crucial for professional success. Professionals are thought to be experts in abstract thought, and it is “control of the abstractions that generate the practical technique” (p. 8). Conversely, those who are expertly skilled, and therefore able to control *technique* as opposed to abstract thought, are considered craftspeople. This definition clarifies precisely how and why teaching, and other helping occupations, have long been designated “semi-professional” (Demirkasımoğlu, 2010; Etzioni, 1969;



Ornstein, 1977). Despite their high levels of formal education relative to other nonprofessionals, teachers are still viewed as masters of technique due to the fact that their work is not driven by their own ideas or motivations, but rather by the need to satisfy directives.

In line with this perspective, Hargreaves (2003) traced four phases in the history of teacher professionalism that were marked by shifts in perspectives on expertise and autonomy in teaching. In the first phase, the *pre-professional age*, virtually no expertise or autonomy was afforded to teachers, who were seen largely as mouth-pieces for superintendents and school leaders. Next came the *age of the autonomous professional*, in which teachers were granted a great deal of autonomy in light of the presumption that their training and experience afforded them expertise in terms of what was best for their students. The *age of collegial professionals* came next as teachers faced increasing regulations and centralized oversight, which meant diminishing autonomy and devaluation of their expertise. Currently, teaching is in the *post-professional age*, which has seen continuous conflict between the forces “intent on de-professionalizing... teaching” and the groups “seeking to re-define teacher professionalism and professional learning in more...postmodern ways that are flexible, wide-ranging and inclusive in nature” (Demirkasımoğlu, 2010, p. 2049). These polar perspectives offer a vivid illustration of the implications of attitudes toward teaching.

Many have argued that allocating teaching to the semi-professional realm is problematic. Semi-professions provide “fewer material rewards and [diminished] social standing” (Bolton & Muzio, 2008, p. 284) when compared to long established and aspiring professions that enjoy “relatively high compensation, and high prestige” (Ingersoll & Merrill, 2011, p. 186). Furthermore, the limited autonomy at the heart of semi-professionalism is implicated in current global staffing difficulties. According to the OECD

(2003), “conferring professional autonomy to teachers will enhance the attractiveness of the profession as a career choice and will improve the quality of the classroom teaching practice” (p. 2). Furthermore, professional autonomy has been shown to impact the job satisfaction and emotional well-being of teachers powerfully (Hargreaves, 2000), which may support career longevity.

Taking a broader view, scholars and teacher advocates have argued that the semi-professional status assigned to teaching is tied to the belief that teachers follow marching orders from federal, state, and district mandates, and therefore do not need the skills or proficiencies that would be required in professional work. However, this does not affect all teachers equally as evidenced by the “glass elevator” effect (McConnell-Ginet, 2000), which refers to the fact that men occupy the majority of school leadership positions despite the fact that women occupy the majority of teaching positions. More precisely, male teachers are more likely to be promoted out of the classroom and into professional administrative positions. According to Jones (2008), male principals were aware that men were “being propelled into leadership positions by groups within society” (p. 695). In interviews with male administrators who had been promoted out of the classroom, Cushman (2005) found that “being promoted quickly into senior positions can be seen by some men as compensation for their ‘questionable career choice’” (p. 323), allowing them to regain their autonomy and their place in the professional thought-economy (Cruikshank, 2012).

The fact that a man’s decision to become a teacher is perceived as “questionable” speaks to the ways in which gender is performed and enacted in the world of work, which is a root cause undergirding the glass elevator effect and the perception that feminine occupations are inherently less professional. As Bolton and Muzio (2008) explained, “...to be (or to aspire to be) a professional is ‘to do’ gender; to comply with behavioral and

interactional norms that celebrate and sustain a masculine vision of what it is to be a professional” (p. 283), which necessarily marginalizes and devalues any work that is considered “feminine.”

### **Summary of Perceptions of Teachers**

In this brief overview of occupational Status and teacher professionalization, six specific perceptions of teaching were discussed. For one, the research on Status demonstrated that (a) teaching is perceived as requiring little or no formal education, particularly for women who are thought to be innately nurturing and predisposed to care for children. The prestige literature clarified how (b) teachers have been and will continue to be valued at the same level over broad spans of time; although the value afforded to teaching (as determined by formal measures of prestige) does not correspond with the monetary value attributed to the work of teaching (i.e., salary). This disjunction between prestige and pay for teachers comes in part from (c) a perception that teachers are dedicated and care about their work without desiring or expecting material rewards for said work. Lastly, teaching is perceived to be a semi-profession that, despite requiring formal education, multiple credentials, and continuing professional development, as it is thought to lack the (d) intellectual demands, (e) autonomy, and (f) ambition for upward mobility that mark the true professions.

## **Chapter 3: Method**

In this chapter, I describe the methods I used in the current study. First, I describe my sampling procedures, including participant selection and recruitment methods. Next, I trace the process of developing, piloting, and implementing the interview protocol. Subsequently, I offer an overview of data collection (i.e., recruitment questionnaire and interview) procedures, followed by data analytic methods. I conclude the chapter by discussing the trustworthiness of my methods.

### **PARTICIPANT SAMPLING PROCEDURES**

Participants in this study were public school teachers living and working either in Massachusetts or Texas. Public school teachers, as opposed to charter and private school teachers, were sampled for a number of reasons. For one, the majority of existing research, and the research on which this study was based, involves public school teachers. This is due in part to the relatively recent introduction of charter schools to the American educational landscape, and to the small number of charter and private school teachers relative to public school teachers (NCES, 2015). Furthermore, the decision to limit sampling to public school teachers grew from a decades-long downward trend in terms of Americans' trust in public education (Bingham, Haubrich, & White, 1989; Loveless, 1997). Finally, public schools are beholden to state and federal policy to a greater degree than charter and private schools, such that the public school teachers within each state from which I drew participants shared exosystemic contextual factors. As outlined previously (see Chapter 2), Texas and Massachusetts have markedly different approaches to public education and education policy making, as well as regionalized cultures and Discourses. By comparing responses within and between state sub-samples, I sought to identify the role

that the exosystem and macrosystem may play in the development of teachers' perceptions of attitudes toward teaching.

In order to obtain a representative sample from each state, I consulted federal and state agency reports to calculate appropriate proportions of sub-groups within each state. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES; 2013a), 26.5% of teachers in Massachusetts were male and 73.5% were female. In Texas, 22.6% of teachers were male and 77.4% were female. In an effort to interview a representative sample of teachers, I aimed to interview two to three male teachers and six to seven female teachers in each state. With regard to race, less than 10% of teachers in Massachusetts identified as people of color (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2017b; DESE), whereas almost 40% of teachers in Texas identified as people of color (TEA, 2016b). Based on these figures, I aimed to sample two or three teachers of color from Massachusetts and three or four teachers of color from Texas. I aimed also to sample teachers who varied on other criteria of interest including how long an individual had been a teacher, the number of schools in which an individual had taught, and the grade level/content area an individual taught.

### **Recruitment Procedures**

Participants were recruited primarily through convenience sampling and snowball sampling procedures. This included posting to social media (i.e., Facebook, twitter), reaching out to my own networks of teachers in Texas and Massachusetts, and asking friends in education fields to distribute materials to their friends, family, and colleagues. In order to incentivize participation, I explained that those individuals who completed the interview would receive a \$25 gift card to their choice of Amazon.com or Starbucks. In

addition to the material incentive, it is likely that teachers were motivated by “the opportunity to help an occupation” to which they belong (Kruger & Casey, 2015, p. 97).

To sign up for the study, teachers were directed to follow a link (provided in recruiting material) that brought them to a questionnaire designed and administered through Qualtrics. The questionnaire provided basic information about the study and an explanation of participation requirements. Then, participants were asked if they met the inclusion criteria. If so, they were directed to a seven-item questionnaire that included questions about their schools, their teaching experience, gender, race, and preferred contact information.

As teachers signed up to participate, those who fit the inclusion criteria were added to a master list. In order to protect against sampling bias, each participant was assigned a random participant number using Microsoft Excel’s random number generation function (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Once random numbers were assigned, the participants were sorted according to gender, race, and community-type (e.g., urban, suburban, rural). Then, a representative proportion of participants within each demographic sub-group was selected based on their randomly-assignment numbers. The participants with the smallest numbers were invited to participate first.

Over the course of three months, I contacted a total of 35 teachers who had completed the interest survey and qualified for the study. Those who did not respond within one week of my initial invitation were sent a second email reminding them that they had been invited to participate in the study and informing them that I would need to receive their response within 48 hours or they would be removed from the participant pool. Seventeen teachers did not reply to either of the two emails inviting them to participate in an interview. One teacher agreed to participate but could not be reached at the agreed upon time of his interview or any time thereafter.

When teachers declined, could not be reached, or did not respond to the follow-up email, I contacted the next teacher in that demographic subgroup. For each participant who accepted, I sent a second email, asking the individual when she/he was available to be interviewed; whether she/he preferred to be interviewed over Skype, FaceTime, phone, or in person; and whether she/he preferred a gift certificate to Amazon.com or Starbucks. I also asked all to endorse the informed consent paperwork with their digital signature and send it back to me before the scheduled date of the interview.

### **Participants**

Nine of the participants I interviewed for this study were teachers in Texas and nine were teachers in Massachusetts (see Table 1 for information on demographics and teaching context). In line with the sampling objectives, which were based on the 2011-2012 Schools and Staffing Survey (NCES, 2013a), I interviewed 13 women and 5 men.

Nine teachers of color completed the interest survey. I contacted these individuals before reaching out to white participants in an effort to ensure that voices of teachers of colors were represented adequately. However, I contacted these teachers in August and September, at which time participants were less responsive overall. I did interview one teacher of color from Massachusetts (Lynne) who identified as multiracial, and two teachers of color from Texas, including Clarissa, who identified as Hispanic, and Tess, who identified as African-American. I considered reaching out to the other teachers of color again in October, but this would have violated my IRB protocol, in which I had noted that I would contact unresponsive participants twice only. In Chapter 5, I address the implications of this misstep as a methodological, theoretical, and ethical limitation of the study.

Table 1. Participants' Demographic Information and Teaching Context

	Demographic Information		Teaching Context		
	Race	Sex	State	Community	Level
<b>Allison</b>	White (not Hispanic)	F	TX	Small town/rural	Middle school
<b>Calvin</b>	White (not Hispanic)	M	MA	Suburb	High school
<b>Clarissa</b>	Latina/Hispanic	F	TX	Urban center	Elementary
<b>Corrine</b>	White (not Hispanic)	F	MA	Urban center	High school
<b>Denise</b>	White (not Hispanic)	F	MA	Suburb	Middle school
<b>Dustin</b>	White (not Hispanic)	M	TX	Urban center	Elementary
<b>Emily</b>	White (not Hispanic)	F	MA	Urban center	Middle school
<b>Farrah</b>	White (not Hispanic)	F	TX	Urban center	High school
<b>Helen</b>	White (not Hispanic)	F	TX	Suburb	High school
<b>Jeff</b>	White (not Hispanic)	M	MA	Urban center	Elementary
<b>Joy</b>	White (not Hispanic)	F	TX	Urban center	High school
<b>Keith</b>	White (not Hispanic)	M	MA	Urban center	High school
<b>Kristina</b>	White (not Hispanic)	F	MA	Suburb	High school
<b>Lynne</b>	Multiracial	F	MA	Suburb	Middle school
<b>Marcus</b>	White (not Hispanic)	M	TX	Small town/rural	High school
<b>Molly</b>	White (not Hispanic)	F	TX	Central city	High school
<b>Tess</b>	Black/African-American	F	TX	Urban center	Elementary
<b>Valerie</b>	White (not Hispanic)	F	MA	Central city	Middle school

### *Teaching Context*

Regarding teaching contexts (see Table 1), four participants were teaching elementary school, five were teaching middle school, and nine were teaching high school students. Although more balance would have been preferable, low response rates from elementary (36%) and middle school (45%) teachers relative to high school teachers (64%) yielded a larger sample of high school teachers.

Nine participants taught in urban schools and five taught in suburban schools. Unfortunately, only two taught in small town/rural schools and two in what the TEA (2016a) terms “central cities,” or districts that are “not contiguous to a major urban district,” (n.p.) have populations between 100,000 and 950,000 and serve a student body

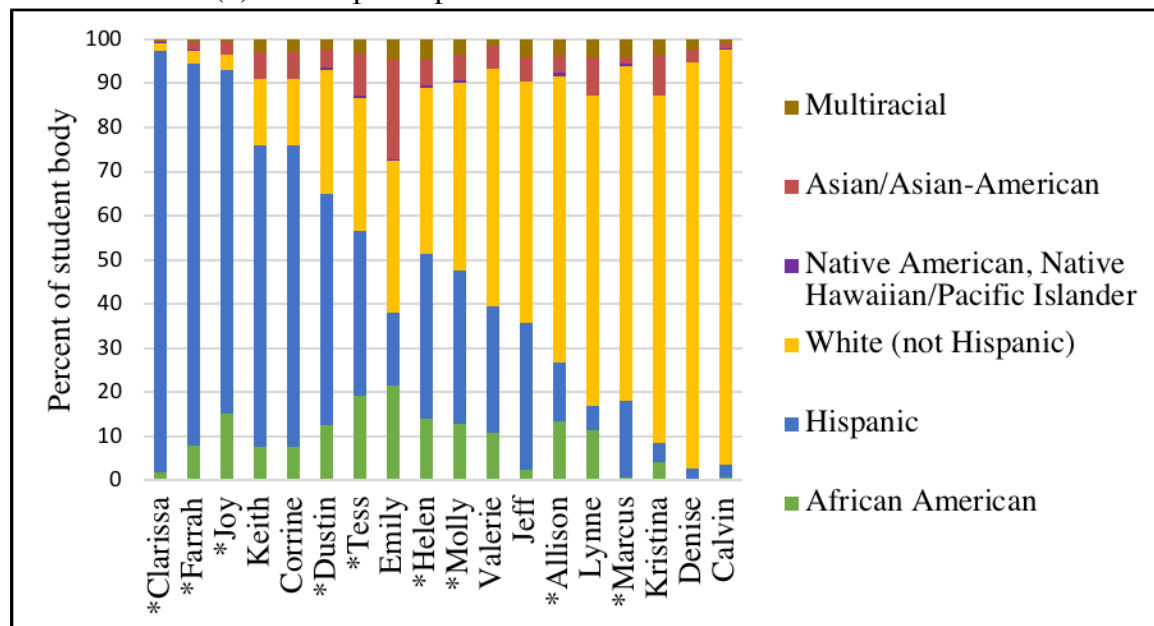


that is at least 75% as large as the largest school district in the county. Although response rates were similar for teachers from suburban (45%), urban (50%), and small town/rural districts (50%), more teachers in urban (18) than suburban (11) or small town/rural districts (4) completed the interest survey for the study.

Participants' teaching contexts were also examined in terms of the students they serve. Information about the students in Massachusetts was obtained from the DESE's (2017) online *Public school and district profiles*. I utilized the TEA's 2016-17 school report card site to obtain demographic information on students in Texas. The racial composition of the student body at each participants' school can be found in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Racial Composition of Participants' Schools

*Note:* Asterisks (\*) denote participants who were teachers in Texas.



### ***Teaching Background***

The participants that I interviewed had been teaching between two and 25 years, with a mean of nine years in the classroom. Ten of the participants had taught in one school

for the duration of their teaching careers, which ranged in length from two to 18 years. Four of the participants had taught in two different schools over the course of careers ranging from six to ten years. Two participants had taught in three different schools over the course of five to seven years. One participant had taught in five schools over the course of 19 years, and one had taught in eight schools over the course of a 25-year career.

Eleven participants were *career teachers*, meaning they did not have careers before entering the teaching profession. Seven were *second-career teachers*, meaning they had had careers before becoming teachers. Allison had been a lawyer, Emily had been a nurse, Kristina had been a political aide, Keith had worked in the music industry, Lynne had worked in development for an international non-profit organization, Molly had been a veterinary technician, and Valerie had been a waitress (see Table 2 for participants' teaching backgrounds/experience).

Table 2. Participants' Teaching and Occupational Background

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Teaching experience (years)</b>	<b>Schools</b>	<b>Prior career</b>
<b>Allison</b>	9	1	Lawyer, homemaker
<b>Calvin</b>	10	2	N/A
<b>Clarissa</b>	9	2	N/A
<b>Corrine</b>	6	2	N/A
<b>Denise</b>	25	8	N/A
<b>Dustin</b>	5	1	N/A
<b>Emily</b>	19	5	Nurse
<b>Farrah</b>	2	1	N/A
<b>Helen</b>	6	1	N/A
<b>Jeff</b>	5	3	N/A
<b>Joy</b>	7	3	N/A
<b>Keith</b>	10	1	Talent management
<b>Kristina</b>	7	1	Congressional aid
<b>Lynne</b>	6	2	Development officer
<b>Marcus</b>	11	1	N/A
<b>Molly</b>	2	1	Veterinary technician
<b>Tess</b>	18	1	N/A
<b>Valerie</b>	5	1	Waitress, dog walker

## **DATA SOURCES AND DATA COLLECTION**

Transcripts of interviews served as the primary data source for this study, with participants' responses to the interest questionnaires as a secondary data source. In the following sections, I describe how the interview protocol was developed and how the interviews themselves were completed, recorded, and transcribed. Information on the creation and purpose of the interest questionnaire can be found in the previous section on participant recruitment.

### **Development of Interview Protocol**

Development of the interview protocol was an iterative and collaborative process informed by the research questions and by existing literature on perceptions of teachers and teachers' interactions with various groups. As an initial step, based on recommendations from Krueger and Casey (2015), I held a 90-minute working session with two other researchers who had varying levels of experience/background on the attitudes and the psychology of teachers. One of the researchers was a former kindergarten teacher and current doctoral candidate who had conducted multiple studies of teacher stress based on interviews with teachers. The other researcher was a university faculty member with extensive background in qualitative methods and educational psychology, and with experience teaching preservice teachers.

I began the session by providing an overview of the research questions guiding the study and a summary of my overall goals. Next, we took five minutes to brainstorm questions individually. Then each researcher shared her questions with the group, and I compiled a master list. At that point, we engaged in more brainstorming as we continued to add questions to the list and to revise existing questions. A sufficiently large list of questions had been compiled after approximately 75 minutes, at which point we began discussing themes, cohesion, and logical sequencing of questions. Sequencing decisions

were informed by Jacob and Furgerson's (2012) recommendation that questions in an interview proceed from general to specific.

At the conclusion of the meeting, I re-read and revised the interview protocol, making sure the questions were open-ended, clear, direct, and devoid of jargon; and that they included requests for positive as well as negative examples. Shortly thereafter, I presented the questions to my dissertation committee, who provided feedback on the language and direction of the interview protocol. Once I had integrated the committee's recommendation, I met with a member of my dissertation committee who is an expert on qualitative educational research and discourse analysis. During the meeting, she provided guidance on the language of certain questions, and suggested additional topics of interest that were absent from the previous version of the protocol. In that meeting, we also discussed organization and sequencing of questions.

At the conclusion of this meeting, the interview protocol included 35 questions organized into five thematic sections. The first section included three questions about participants' educational background and their recollections of influential teachers. The second section was composed of four questions pertaining to participants' decisions to become teachers and how their peers and family members responded to that decision. It also included a question about the participants' experiences while becoming certified. The third section contained six questions pertained to participants' current (and former) teaching contexts, including questions about how teachers are viewed by administrators, students, and students' families; about positive and negative experiences that participants have had at school; and about how they feel about being teachers. The fourth section contained ten questions about the experience of being a teacher when not at school. This section addressed how often teachers talked about their job outside of school, how non-teachers reacted when they found out the participant was a teacher, whether an experience

outside of school had ever made a participant feel good or bad about being a teacher, and other inquiries into their experiences of being a teacher outside of the teaching context. The final section included nine questions. Four pertained to the participants' opinions on four sub-topics related to teaching, four asked participants to describe the general public's opinions on the same four sub-topics, and one asked them if they could think of specific areas of agreement or disagreement between teachers and the general population of non-teachers. There were also two summarizing questions at the end that gave participants the opportunity to share any additional thoughts and to ask any questions.

I piloted this version of the interview protocol with a personal friend who is a teacher. Although I did not record the sessions, I did make extensive notes about questions that were difficult for me to read or for her to understand or answer, and about questions that interrupted the flow of the conversation or did not seem pertinent to the overall objectives of the study. Based on this pilot interview, I made a number of revisions to the sequence of the questions in order to promote continuity, and I removed three questions. The finalized interview protocol can be found in the Appendix.

### **Interview and Transcription Procedures**

The majority of interviews were conducted through Skype, Facetime, or audio phone call, and one interview was conducted in person. All interviews were recorded using a Zoom audio recorder. I conducted 13 interviews in my home (via voice or video call), four were conducted in private rooms in the University's library or education building (also via voice or video call), and the in-person interview was conducted at the participant's home.

Interviews were transcribed on a rolling basis using ExpressScribe, a transcription facilitation application in which audio and text files can be stored securely. While

transcribing the interviews, I replaced participants' names with pseudonyms and replaced all potentially identifying information with brief descriptors (e.g., [Principal], [Wife], [District]). Once the transcriptions were complete, they were uploaded into Dedoose, an encrypted, web-based qualitative data management program in which I conducted the first phases of analysis.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

Transcripts were analyzed using a multi-phase general inductive approach. Analyses were inductive in so far as they were directed by the data themselves and not by a priori hypotheses or predictions. The philosophical orientation of my analysis was phenomenological in that the analyses informed a core research objective of exploring various teachers' experiences and perceptions of the attitudes about teaching conveyed in their interactions with others.

Although this study was primarily exploratory and was not designed with the intended purpose of deriving theory, I drew heavily on the central assumptions and methodological procedures of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). A number of the assumptions that undergird grounded theory also informed the structure and execution of this study, particularly the assumption that "[in] effect, there is no divide between external or interior world" in that "interior worlds are created and recreated through interaction" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 6). I also drew on analytic procedures within grounded theory, specifically constant comparison and open and axial coding.

### **Phase One**

The first phase of analysis included the informal process of reading four interview transcripts and making marginal notes about participants' references to attitudes or beliefs about teachers/teaching, as well as the bioecological contexts in which said attitudes and

beliefs were situated. Through this process, I began to familiarize myself with relevant and peripheral themes, topics, and contexts within the data. Moreover, this initial phase allowed me to compare four participants' responses in order to identify some areas or topics on which participants likely would express divergent opinions or interpretations.

## **Phase Two**

Having compiled my marginal notes from the first phase and developed a tentative set of attitude and context codes, I began the second analytic phase. This involved open coding of two additional transcripts and re-coding of the first four transcripts based on the revised version of the code list. Each comment that referenced an attitude about teaching either explicitly (e.g., Tess: "...people respect the profession") or implicitly (e.g., Emily: "They just tell me that it's an incredible job and they can't imagine doing it themselves") was assigned two codes in Dedoose: one code described the attitude that was perceived, and the other described the context in which it had been expressed.

By the end of Phase two, I had identified 25 codes that described attitudes toward teaching and 32 contextual codes. Contextual codes included nine elements of the individual (e.g., gender, parent's employment), 12 elements of the microsystem (e.g., friends/peers, students), nine mesosystemic elements (e.g., faculty/staff, administrators' interactions with students' parents), six exosystemic elements (e.g., news media, federal government), and four macrosystemic elements (e.g., Hispanic culture, conservative ideology).

## **Phase Three**

Although open coding is often considered a precursor to axial coding, Corbin and Strauss (2008) argued that "distinctions made between the two types of coding are 'artificial,'" and that the two processes should "go hand in hand" (p. 198). Thus, during the

third phase of analysis, in accordance with grounded theory, I read three more transcripts, continuing to perform open coding and concurrently starting the process of axial coding by consolidating codes or reorganizing ideas based on thematic similarity or coherence.

After analyzing these additional transcripts, the 25 attitude codes were consolidated into 15 (e.g., trustworthiness, quality/merit, demands of the job, skills required), and the 32 context codes were consolidated into 29 elements of interest (six individual, six microsystem, seven mesosystem, six exosystem, and four macrosystem). At this point in the analysis, I also determined that attitudes contextualized at the individual level (i.e., reflecting a participant's own attitudes and beliefs about teaching), although interesting, did not pertain to the research questions guiding the study. Thus, individual-level codes were removed from the evolving list. Interestingly, three attitude codes fell away when the individual context was removed. This left 23 contextual elements of interest and 12 attitude codes.

#### **Phase Four**

Over the course of the first three phases, I had read half of the participants' interviews and was approaching saturation. In light of that, minimal open coding transpired from then on, and the remaining nine interviews were coded based almost entirely on the set of codes created over the first three phases. However, I continued with axial coding as I further consolidated and reorganized codes as I analyzed the remaining transcripts.

Once all of the transcripts had been coded, I used analytic tools in Dedoose to visualize the number of participants who had endorsed each code. Codes that had been endorsed by only a single participant were removed or (when appropriate) consolidated. At that point, seven categories of attitudes and beliefs remained: *denigrating/devaluing*



*beliefs, desirable/valuable career, general positivity, qualifications and abilities, stereotypes of teachers, undesirable career, and sources of variation.*

I determined also that the elements of the meso-, exo-, and macrosystems had become so specialized that few participants endorsed each element. As such, I consolidated the sub-categories within each of these three systems so that the systems themselves served as context codes. A number of elements within the microsystem, however, were common contexts for expressions of attitudes about teachers, and were retained as separate context codes. As a result, the final list of eight context codes included the macrosystem, the exosystem, the mesosystem, and five elements of the microsystem (administrators, students' parents, students, friends and family, and people outside of school).

### **Phase Five**

Spreadsheets for the seven remaining categories of attitudes were downloaded from Dedoose. Each spreadsheet contained all of the excerpts that had been coded for a theme, as well as the context codes and any attitude sub-codes of that had been applied to each excerpt. I read through the entries on each spreadsheet in order to re-check that codes had been applied accurately, and I made changes when necessary. I paid particular attention to the codes that had been applied to the first nine transcripts in light of the fact that new codes continued to be added regularly until I had completed those nine transcripts.

Throughout this phase of the process, I continued to reorganize and rename codes and categories, although I did not alter the meaning or significance of codes that had been assigned in Dedoose unless an excerpt clearly had been miscoded. For example, the category of "general positivity" was eliminated and its sub-categories were made into the superordinate themes: *appreciative, respectful, and trusting/supportive attitudes*. By the

end of this phase, I finalized the list of eight attitude themes and eight focal context codes (see Table 3 for finalized list of themes and sub-categories).

Table 3. Themes and Sub-Categories of Attitudes Toward Teachers

Positive themes	Sub-categories
Appreciative attitudes	Effective/good teacher; Cares about students; Affection/enjoyment; Curiosity/interest; Gratitude
Respectful attitudes	Professional respect; Occupational esteem; Manners/courtesy
Trusting/supportive attitudes	None
Occupational attitudes	Rewarding; Practical; A job like any other; Pride/enthusiasm
Negative themes	Sub-categories
Unprofessional attitudes	Lack of professional respect; Lack of autonomy/voice; Lack of investment in professional growth; Lack of support
Demeaning attitudes	Disrespect/elitism; Those who can't; Devaluation; Disinterest/dismissiveness
Adversarial attitudes	Blame; distrust; Aggression/threats
Stereotypical attitudes	Criminals/predators; "Cushy"/easy; Ineffective; Individual stereotypes

## TRUSTWORTHINESS AND VALIDITY CONCERNS

Similar to validity, *credibility* is the extent to which claims represent participants' actual lived experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I utilized two strategies to strengthen the credibility of my study. First, I engaged in *peer debriefing* in two contexts. I met frequently with my dissertation chair over the course of the study. She read sections of the document as they developed and she provided feedback, critique, redirection, and suggestions about areas of inquiry that I had not pursued previously. I also met weekly with a group of doctoral candidates with whom I shared findings and exchanged ideas and questions. One member of this group, a former elementary school teacher with expertise in Latinx families' experiences in U.S. schools, played a particularly important role in challenging me to rethink claims and interpretations in the name of *fairness*, or "a balanced

view that presents all constructions and the values that undergird them” (Schwandt, et al., 2007, p. 20).

I also used *member checking* to strengthen the credibility of my claims and interpretations. I sent excerpts of my findings to eight participants at three different points while I was composing my findings and discussion. In an effort to perform member checking with a representative sample of my participants, I sent excerpts to male and female teachers; teachers from Texas and Massachusetts; from all three school levels; urban, suburban, and rural schools; and levels of experience ranging from five to 25 years. More importantly, I conducted member checking with two of the three teachers of color. Interpretations are necessarily informed by one’s own cultural, positional, and experiential perspective. Therefore, as a white woman, my interpretations of the words and experiences of women of color should be scrutinized to a greater degree. Asking participants of color to sign off on or correct the excerpts that I sent to them achieved this to some degree.

The excerpts that I sent to each participant included multiple sections of my findings in which they (as well as other participants) had been quoted. I asked the participants to read through the excerpts and respond to three questions: (a) *Do you feel like you are represented accurately?*; (b) *Are you comfortable with what you read in these excerpts?*; and (c) *Is there anything that you would like to add, clarify, change, or ask about from these excerpts?* Five of the eight participants responded that they were accurately represented, they were comfortable with what was written, and they did not request any changes or additions. Two participants found the excerpts to be accurate, and they were comfortable with what was written, although they requested minor changes to their quotations (i.e., omit a curse word, change the word “stuff”). The changes they requested did not alter the meaning or tone of the quotations, so I obliged their requests. One participant did not respond to my member checking request or a follow-up email.

In terms of overall trustworthiness, *transferability*, or the extent to which claims generalize to broader populations, was not a high priority in this study. Bronfenbrenner's (1999) bioecological model argues that development is highly individualized in light of the complex sets of interactions that take place within and between systems. From that perspective, the amount of information collected about each participant in the present study could not adequately support generalizations about the development of teachers' perceptions of attitudes toward teaching.

Nonetheless, I do offer claims about such aspects as regional cultural differences and gender differences in perceptions of others' attitudes, and the transferability of these claims should be considered. Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained that one can enhance transferability through *thick descriptive data*, which they defined as the depth and breadth of the "narrative developed about the context..." (Schwandt, Lincoln, & Guba, 2007, p. 19). Thick description guides future application of claims/findings. Although descriptions in the current study are not "thick" in the manner that would be needed for naturalistic observation or ethnographic studies, they likely are adequate for interviews-based research. For each participant, I collected information on individual demographics and characteristics, their educational and occupational background, families and friends, and teaching background and context. Thus, for each participant, a great deal of context is provided.

Dependability and confirmability were strengthened through multiple auditing sources with which I engaged over the course of this study. In developing the current study, members of my dissertation committee served as inquiry auditors. Having read through an early version of my proposed methods, they made recommendations about altering my data collection methods, recruitment of a representative sample, sampling procedures, and the development and revision of interview protocols. Their ongoing audits of my process

strengthened the *dependability* of the study. *Confirmability* audits were provided by my dissertation chair and the group of doctoral candidates with whom I met weekly.

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

The present study was guided by four research questions. In this chapter, I respond to the first research question by illustrating the types of attitudes that participants perceived. I address the second research question by describing the various contexts in which the participants perceived attitudes toward teachers and the teaching profession. I attend to my third research question by discussing the sources of variation in non-teachers' attitudes that participants described in their interviews, and I describe differences in participants' interpretations of/responses to expressions of attitudes toward teaching. In the final section, I provide an overview of contextual/demographic differences in participants' perceptions of attitudes toward teachers and the teaching profession.

### **ATTITUDES ABOUT TEACHERS AND TEACHING**

Across the interviews, participants described what they perceived to be positive and negative attitudes about the teaching profession. Despite the fact that the strength of positivity and negativity varied from participant to participant, all 18 participants discussed both positive and negative attitudes. In following sections, I describe four themes pertaining to positive attitudes, and four themes pertaining to negative attitudes. Each section contains descriptions of sub-categories of the themes and illustrative quotations to clarify the thematic structure.

#### **Positive Attitudes Toward Teachers and Teaching**

Positive attitudes discussed in the participants' interviews fell into four broad themes. Positive attitudes were *appreciative*, *respectful*, *trusting/supportive*, and *occupational*. Various topics and sub-categories were identified within each of these themes. Often, the sub-topics refer to beliefs, which are fundamental to the development of attitudes (Dejoy, 1999). A list of the themes and sub-categories is located in Table 3.

### *Appreciative Attitudes*

Excerpts coded as *appreciative* reflected gratitude or pleasure directed at the participant, another teacher, or teachers in general. Seventeen participants endorsed *appreciative* attitudes, and it was the most commonly referenced of the four categories of positive attitudes toward teachers (see Table 4 for the number of participants who endorsed each positive attitude at each level of context).

Table 4. Participants' Endorsement of Positive Attitudes Across Contexts

	Appreciative	Respectful	Trusting/ supportive	Occupational
<b>Students</b>	12	5	2	3
<b>Friends/family members</b>	5	5	0	15
<b>Individuals outside school</b>	6	5	0	1
<b>Administrators</b>	5	8	13	0
<b>Students' parents</b>	10	7	9	0
<b>Mesosystem</b>	1	3	4	0
<b>Macrosystem</b>	4	1	0	5
<b>Total</b>	43	34	28	24

Throughout the data, participants used the word “appreciation” in various ways that conveyed different meanings and interpretations or described appreciation without using the word at all. In considering the many ways that participants experienced and understood *appreciative* attitudes toward teachers, I developed five sub-categories of appreciation. These sub-categories include two reasons that teachers were appreciated (i.e., effective/good teacher; interested in/care about students) and three ways that appreciation was conveyed to teachers (i.e., affection; curiosity/interest; gratitude).

In looking at the reasons that teachers were appreciated, seven participants pointed to perceptions of teachers as effective or otherwise “good” teachers. One of those teachers,

Allison, shared that she had taught the child of a federal magistrate who “wrote a really nice letter to the principal...commending me and the 8th grade teacher for the way that we taught his kids.” Clearly, Allison perceived the magistrate’s letter as demonstrating his appreciation for the quality of her instruction. Three teachers described *appreciative* attitudes regarding teachers’ sincere care for or interest in their students. For example, Helen mentioned the importance of showing students’ families that she cares about their children, and letting them know, “‘I’m a human that is taking care of your child for an hour and half each other day, so let’s work together on this.’ I think they really appreciate that.” The participants tended not to speculate about specific actions or interactions that elicited appreciation from others, yet these two areas, effectiveness and care for the students, were referenced by roughly half of the participants.

Participants were quite expressive with regards to the ways that *appreciative* attitudes were conveyed to them. Specifically, they referred to gratitude, affection/enjoyment, and curiosity/interest as ways that teachers could be appreciated. Gratitude was the most commonly endorsed sub-category of *appreciative* attitudes with 15 participants describing interactions both inside and outside of the classroom. Calvin reported that outside of school when people find out that he is a teacher, often “they’re like, ‘That’s great. Thanks for doing what you do.’” Thirteen participants described affection or enjoyment as a way appreciation was conveyed to them. For instance, Dustin explained that he meets with a group of students that he taught in his second year teaching. He shared, “I meet them every summer and they tell me, ‘...I had such a good time in your class.’ That means a lot of me.” Students’ affection for and enjoyment of Dustin was evident in their continued relationship. Curiosity/interest was somewhat less common (endorsed by 7 participants), albeit interesting. Participants’ described curiosity about or interest in teaching as a demonstration of appreciation for teaching itself. Keith believed this to be a



fairly wide-spread phenomenon. He explained, “People love to talk about [teaching]. When you tell someone you’re a teacher, I find people want to talk to you about it...People are really curious about what it’s like [to be a teacher].” Curiosity and interest of this kind were perceived as evidence of positive, *appreciative attitudes* about teaching.

### ***Respectful Attitudes***

*Respectful* attitudes toward teachers were endorsed by all 18 participants. This theme, which involved various forms of respect afforded to teachers and the teaching profession, was broken into three sub-categories that speak to different ways participants described respectful attitudes being conveyed. The broadest and most commonly referenced sub-category was professional respect, followed by occupational esteem, and manners/courtesy.

Professional respect pertained to investment/interest in teachers’ professional growth, respect for teachers’ autonomy/voice, viewing teachers as professionals/experts, and various other subjects relevant to teacher professionalism. Eleven participants described positive experiences in which professional respect was conveyed to them or other teachers. For example, Clarissa recalled her experiences working with the principal in her previous school. According to Clarissa, “She [the principal] would really empower us...She was really good about growing people. You know? And she left you alone if you did well, but she was a really good at also highlighting you.” Clarissa felt empowered by a principal who recognized expert teachers and supported their professional autonomy.

The second sub-category, occupational esteem, was endorsed by eight participants and it referred to “the regard in which [teaching] is held...by virtue of the personal qualities which [teachers] are perceived as bringing to their core task” (Hoyle, 2001, p. 174). Occupational esteem came from a variety of contexts and often was unexpected. For

example, when Valerie told her neighbor that she was a teacher, “He was like [gasps sharply], ‘That’s amazing...My mom’s a nurse, my dad’s a firefighter, and I think nurses and teachers and firefighters are just the best people on earth.’” Based on his reaction, it appeared that Valerie’s neighbor had developed a strong sense of esteem for helping occupations (Ellis, Ratnasingam, & Wheeler, 2012) including teaching.

Potentially related to occupational esteem was the third sub-category, manners/courtesy. The three teachers who spoke of *respectful* attitudes in terms of manners and courtesy served predominantly students who identified as Latinx/Hispanic, and the participants recognized this as relevant in terms of attitudes toward teachers. For example, when Joy was asked how students’ families view the teachers in her school, she responded, “[Respect] for school and for the school system, and a lot of expectation that your child will be polite and respectful.” She added that this attitude was “more noticeable in the Hispanic population.” Although Joy perceived *respectful* attitudes in many of her interactions, she recognized respect for teachers as a cultural norm among her Latinx/Hispanic students and their families.

### ***Trusting and Supportive Attitudes***

Seventeen participants referred to *trusting/supportive* attitudes toward teachers. Looking across the interviews in which participants perceived *trusting/supportive* attitudes, twelve reported experiences in which both trusting and supportive attitudes had been conveyed. For instance, Marcus explained that his school had seen a number of changes to administration, and that the current administration was both trusting and supportive of teachers. He explained,

They simply clear the way of any obstacle and say “Get into your classroom. We trust that you are good educators. We trust that you are professionals. Get the job done.” And it’s allowed us to try so many things in the classroom...and our

administration supports us...[They] give us as much resource as they can, and they check in on us, they reflect with us...

In addition, there were three teachers (Allison, Calvin, and Emily) who described supportive attitudes without referencing trusting attitudes; as well as two (Farrah and Lynne) who referred to trusting, but not supportive attitudes toward teachers.

### ***Occupational Attitudes: Positive Attitudes about Teaching as a Career Choice***

Once again, nearly all of the participants (17) endorsed this theme, which focused on positive attitudes about teaching as a career choice. Although the sub-categories of this theme ranged in terms of strength, each conveyed positive beliefs about teaching as an occupational option for the participants or for job seekers in general.

The most commonly referenced sub-category of *occupational attitudes* involved beliefs about teaching as intrinsically rewarding, and therefore a good career choice. Twelve teachers described instances in which this belief had been expressed to them. Helen reported that when she discusses her career with non-teachers, “they’re like, ‘Yeah, that must be really good to see [the students] grow up and go on and do better things,’ and it is!” The non-teachers to which Helen referred believe that teachers enjoy intrinsic rewards from playing a part in the lives of young people. Still others emphasized beliefs about the practicality of a teaching career. For example, Lynne’s mother had been a teacher herself and had recommended that Lynne consider a teaching career as well. According to Lynne,

I think my mom always felt like teaching was a great profession because it allows you to have a family. ...[Her] thing was, “Oh this will be great because you’re going to get a husband and you’re going to want your summers off so you can take care of the kids.”

In an off-shoot of practicality, four participants relayed stories in which their friends and family members expressed the belief that teaching is a job like any other, and therefore is

a viable career option. For example, Jeff said that when he told his family that he had decided to become a teacher,

...it wasn't even so much that they approved of the teaching part of it; it was that they approved that I had found something that I loved, that I was committed to, and that I enjoyed. It just happened to be teaching.

According to Jeff, if he had fallen in love with welding or accounting, his parents would have been equally pleased. Their approval was predicated on his finding a career regardless of the field. On the other hand, three participants described friends and family reacting with pride and enthusiasm about the participants' decision to become a teacher. Clarissa, a second generation Mexican-American who was the first in her family to graduate from high school, recalled that on the day she received her associates degree in early childhood education:

[My] grandma was sitting there and she tells me in Spanish that she's so proud of me. She was like, "Look at you...You have these [graduation] robes and you have these papers." She was like, "The struggle that I went through just to get a paper to say I'm part of this country, and you've got into this country and you're able to contribute to the children here."

Clarissa's grandmother was proud of Clarissa for becoming a teacher because it gave her an opportunity to give back to the nation and the community.

### **Negative Attitudes Toward Teachers and Teaching**

Looking across the data, I identified four themes pertaining to the participants' perceptions of negative attitudes toward teachers or teaching. Negative attitudes were categorized as either *unprofessional*, *demeaning*, *adversarial*, or *stereotypical* (see Table 5 for number of participants who endorsed each negative attitude theme across contexts and elements). In the following section, I provide a brief overview of each theme, including descriptions of sub-categories and illustrative examples from the participant interviews.

Table 5. Participants' Endorsement of Negative Attitudes Across Contexts

	Demeaning	Adversarial	Unprofessional	Stereotypes
<b>Individuals outside school</b>	13	1	0	8
<b>Student' parents</b>	9	13	8	2
<b>Administrators</b>	2	4	13	2
<b>Friends/family</b>	9	2	0	6
<b>Students</b>	3	1	0	0
<b>Mesosystem</b>	2	1	4	4
<b>Exosystem</b>	6	1	7	8
<b>Macrosystem</b>	11	6	4	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>44</b>

### *Unprofessional Attitudes*

Fourteen participants described experiences in which they perceived what I refer to as *unprofessional* attitudes, or a lack of professional respect from administrators, students' parents, and policy makers. Specifically, this attitude manifested in four ways. First, five participants stated explicitly that they felt disrespected as professionals or that they were viewed as sub-professional. Dustin, Jeff, and Kristina all used a similar analogy (i.e., comparing attitudes toward doctors and teachers) to illustrate the lack of professional respect afforded to teachers. Jeff explained,

I don't go into my doctor's office and tell him how he should do his job or that he is doing a bad job. You know, I don't have a medical degree...[The] thing that is really most disheartening to me is that people outside of the field, and whether it's right or wrong I'm including policy makers in that group: They do not view teaching as a profession. They don't view teachers as professionals.

Jeff described a lack of professional respect for teachers as a macrosystemic attitude broadly held throughout society.

The second sub-theme, endorsed by seven participants, involved teachers' lack of autonomy or voice. Farrah, for instance, relayed a story about a group of high-achieving Texas teachers who were recruited by policy makers to revise the state standards (TEKS; Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills). According to Farrah, however, when the teachers submitted their revisions, the policy makers "threw out every single suggestion that these teachers...that [the policy makers] picked from around the state [had made]. They're like, 'Fuck you, you don't know what you're talking about.'" Farrah perceived that at the highest levels of decision making, teachers' voices were disregarded even when they had been originally solicited.

Disrespect for teachers as professionals could also be conveyed through administrators' lack of interest or investment in teachers' professional growth. For example, Lynne's principal denied a request she had made for two unpaid days off to attend a training and site visit in South Africa. Lynne reflected, "So that was when I was like, 'What the heck? I'm not working in a place that actually wants me to become a better educator.'" Lynne's independent pursuit of professional growth was impeded by her own principal.

The final way that participants described *unprofessional* attitudes involved the lack of support provided to teachers. Valerie explained that her building administrators' "intentions are good, but I'll hear things about a lot of balls being dropped, like following up on discipline or making somebody look bad in front of their class..." By failing to support teachers, Valerie's principal made teachers feel unimportant, as if their problems were unimportant and they did not require actual support.

### ***Demeaning Attitudes***

All of the participants described *demeaning* attitudes about the teaching profession that had been conveyed to them or to other teachers. Interestingly, comments pertinent to this theme spanned the bioecological systems to a greater degree than any of the other attitude themes, with large numbers of comments referring to elements of the microsystem (e.g., friends, family, students), the exosystem (e.g., policy/policy makers), and the macrosystem (e.g., ideology, cultural norms).

The first sub-category of *demeaning attitudes*, which included disrespect and elitism, was endorsed by fifteen participants, including Kristina, whose aunt and uncle had insisted that she “should have chosen a profession that used [her] intelligence better.” Kristina reflected,

I was really annoyed with my aunt and uncle when they reacted the way that they did. When people think that you’re less than them because of what you do for your job, that just drives me nuts in general, no matter what the job is.

Her aunt and uncles’ elitism and disrespect for teaching was a source of hurt that, according to Kristina, she continued to feel seven years into her teaching career.

Kristina’s family members’ attitude toward teaching also aligned with the second sub-category, which is based on the George Bernard Shaw quote, “He who can, does. He who cannot, teaches.” Despite the fact that the quote in context “was referring to revolutionaries, not teachers” (Naini, 2006, p. 219), it has come to represent a condescending attitude toward teaching as an easy job that does not require much in the way of capability, aptitude, or ambition. Thus, this sub-category included references to the ease of teaching, the lack of skills, ability, or training necessary to be a teacher, or the phrase, “Those who can’t, teach.” Fifteen participants referred to attitudes in line with this way of thinking, including Dustin, who perceived that students’ families “think that we’re babysitters, and we’re there to take care of their kids during the day.” Dustin, based on his

interactions with students' families, perceived that they viewed teaching as a simpler task than it actually is.

Related to beliefs about the ease of teaching was a sub-category that dealt with devaluing attitudes about teaching and teachers. For example, Emily noted that

during the past [contract] negotiations the mayor suggested that if we had no union he could let everyone go and make them reapply for their jobs at a flat rate of \$40,000 per person. Did not matter to him what the educational qualifications were or how much time and effort went into getting qualified.

The mayor assigned a literal dollar value (and an astonishingly low dollar value considering the Consumer Price Index for Massachusetts) to all teachers, meaning that their training, years of experience, and expertise were of no value to him whatsoever.

The final sub-category of *demeaning attitudes* includes dismissive/disinterested attitudes toward teachers or the teaching profession. The eight participants who referred to dismissive/disinterested attitudes discussed the perception of teaching as an undesirable occupation, and experiences in which others had been disinterested in talking about teaching or talking to teachers. Denise shared a story about traveling to London with a former colleague with whom she had taught. Denise recalled, "When I was going to a party with him or something in London, he said, 'Just don't tell anybody where we met because I don't put teaching... on my resume at all anymore.'" Denise's friend believed that his business associates would be less inclined to engage with him or view him as highly if they learned that he had been a teacher.

### ***Adversarial Attitudes***

Seventeen participants described experiences with or perceptions of *adversarial* attitudes toward themselves or other teachers. These included instances in which teachers were unfairly blamed for unpleasant outcomes, were accused or attacked for some reason,



or were viewed as untrustworthy. Molly described a narrative from political and media discourse around schools that seemed to place blame for all national shortcomings at teachers' feet. She said, "when people start talking about teachers and how the education system is messed up, that's probably when I feel bad. Because I'm like, it's not the teachers that are messed up; it's the system as a whole..." This common narrative seemed to elicit defensiveness from Molly, who believed that she and her colleagues were doing as well as they could within the parameters of the school system.

Perhaps in light of the belief that teachers bear blame for problems in schools, students' parents assumed aggressive and antagonistic positions relative to teachers in some instances. Joy described her interactions with a group of individuals she referred to as "SPED moms," or homemakers who possess ample time and material resources that they use to advocate for their children. According to Joy, "SPED moms" are known for "entering every interaction with this bias toward conflict. Like, [voicing a SPED mom] 'It's going to be a negative interaction. I'm going to approach every interaction that way.'" Denise, also a special education teacher, offered a similar perspective on the adversarial nature of interactions with parents of special education student. She said, "I'm not even sure I would recommend people do special ed anymore...because it's so litigious. You're constantly battling to do what's right for the kids...It's a really tenuous situation to be in." Because Joy worked in a Title I school that served predominantly students identified as economically disadvantaged (ED), she dealt with few "SPED moms." Denise, however, worked in an affluent regional district where the majority of parents had the material resources to threaten litigation frequently.

Even those participants who were unconcerned about litigation or parental threats perceived distrusting attitudes from various sources. Jeff explained that his principal assigned SMART goals to teachers at the beginning of the year despite the fact that

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education requires teachers to develop their own (Massachusetts model system, 2014). To Jeff, his principal's decision to ignore the state mandated protocol for SMART goals was evidence of the principal's attitude toward teachers, and "[that] attitude is writ large across society. 'You [teachers] can't be trusted.'" The use of SMART goals as part of the Massachusetts teacher evaluation system was meant to evidence teachers' professional growth, yet Jeff's principal did not trust teachers to complete that element of the evaluation themselves.

### ***Stereotypical Attitudes and Misconceptions of Teaching***

For the purposes of this study, those beliefs about teachers that participants perceived as false were categorized as negative. Specifically, the participants described a number of stereotypes and misconceptions about teaching, including the belief that teaching is a "cushy" job and that teachers are lazy or greedy; the misconception that U.S. teachers are ineffective; the belief that many teachers are criminals and/or predators; and various other stereotypes about teachers' appearance, temperament, instructional style, and gender.

The most commonly referenced misconception involved the belief that teaching is a "cushy" job, and that those who choose to become teachers are lazy or greedy, hoping to cash in on the material benefits of working for the State. Fourteen participants described experiences with this misconception. For example, Tess stated,

I think most non-educators think that because we're off in the summertime and we're off on Holidays, that that's a privilege. I feel like they think, "Why are you complaining? You're off for two and half weeks at Christmas. You're off for three months in the summer. You're off for Easter holiday. You're off for this—" But what they don't understand is that it doesn't stop because we're on vacation... I feel like they think that we have this plush life, and we don't.

Tess recognized that the misconception of teaching as a “plush life” could interfere with teachers’ ability to advocate for themselves without being accused of “complaining.”

Teachers also may struggle to advocate for themselves in the face of stereotypes about the lack of quality educators in U.S. schools. As Calvin explained, “[People] are always talking down about the state of American education and blah, blah, blah...And it makes me feel bad that people have that sense and, again, they just don’t have the facts.” Calvin’s insistence that members of the general public “just don’t have the facts” illustrates his sense that their beliefs about American schools and teachers are mere misconceptions that informed stereotypical attitudes.

Perhaps more damaging than misconceptions about teachers’ ineffectiveness is the stereotype of teachers as criminals and predators. Six participants expressed concerns about this as an increasingly popular narrative with regard to public school teachers in particular. When Emily was asked if she had ever had an experience outside of school that made her feel bad about being a teacher, she responded, “Whenever you see those things on the news where teachers have abused kids or done anything like that. That’s always, like, ‘Oh my God. What are they thinking?’ Because it tars the whole crowd with the same brush.” According to Emily, news reports about teachers who have abused kids heightened scrutiny of all teachers.

Additionally, there were seven participants who had been directly and personally affected by stereotypes of teachers that revolved around appearance, temperament, and gender. For example, Molly explained, “When most people think of teachers, they think of chalkboard, cardigan on, glasses...I think most people kind of expect that when you say that you’re a teacher.” However, Molly reveled in subverting such stereotypes. She continued, “I have seven visible tattoos, I am an avid sports fan, I hate dressing up for work. I don’t look like a typical teacher.” In some instances, however, gender- and

appearance-based stereotypes could be more pernicious, such as when Kristina noted, “If I’m talking to a man [and say that I am a teacher], I almost always, every single time get some sort of gross comment about, ‘Oh, I wish you were my high school history teacher.’” Kristina found that her career was fetishized by some men who objectified her, reducing her to a specific sexualized stereotype.

### **CONTEXTUALIZING OTHERS’ ATTITUDES TOWARD TEACHING**

The attitudes participants described were contextualized according to Bronfenbrenner’s (1999) bioecological model. According to this framework, context refers to the sites of interaction at which attitudes were conveyed. The vast majority of attitudes in the data pertain to the context of the microsystem, meaning that they were conveyed to participants through direct interactions with friends and family members, students and their parents, administrators and colleagues, or the people with whom participants engaged outside of school. However, participants also described attitudes that were contextualized in the mesosystem (e.g., the community, district, or neighborhood), the exosystem (e.g., media, education policy, policy makers), and the macrosystem (e.g., ideology, cultural/social norms). In the following sections, I provide an overview of the contexts in which each type of attitude was conveyed, and I describe noteworthy patterns in participants’ contextualization of attitudes.

#### **Prevalence and Balance of Contextual Elements**

For each level of context, I determined the number of participants who referenced each type of negative attitude, and the number who referenced each type of positive attitude. The sum of all positive and negative attitudes for each contextual element provided an indication of the general *prevalence* of each context (see Table 6). Students’ parents, part of the microsystem, were the single most prevalent source to which attitudes

were attributed (57 references). Administrators, another element of the microsystem, were also associated frequently (48) with attitudes toward teachers. The next most prevalent context in which attitudes were conveyed was the macrosystem (46), followed by two more elements of the microsystem: friends and family (41) and individuals with whom participants interacted outside of school (37). There was a slight decline in prevalence for students (26), the exosystem (22), and the mesosystem (20).

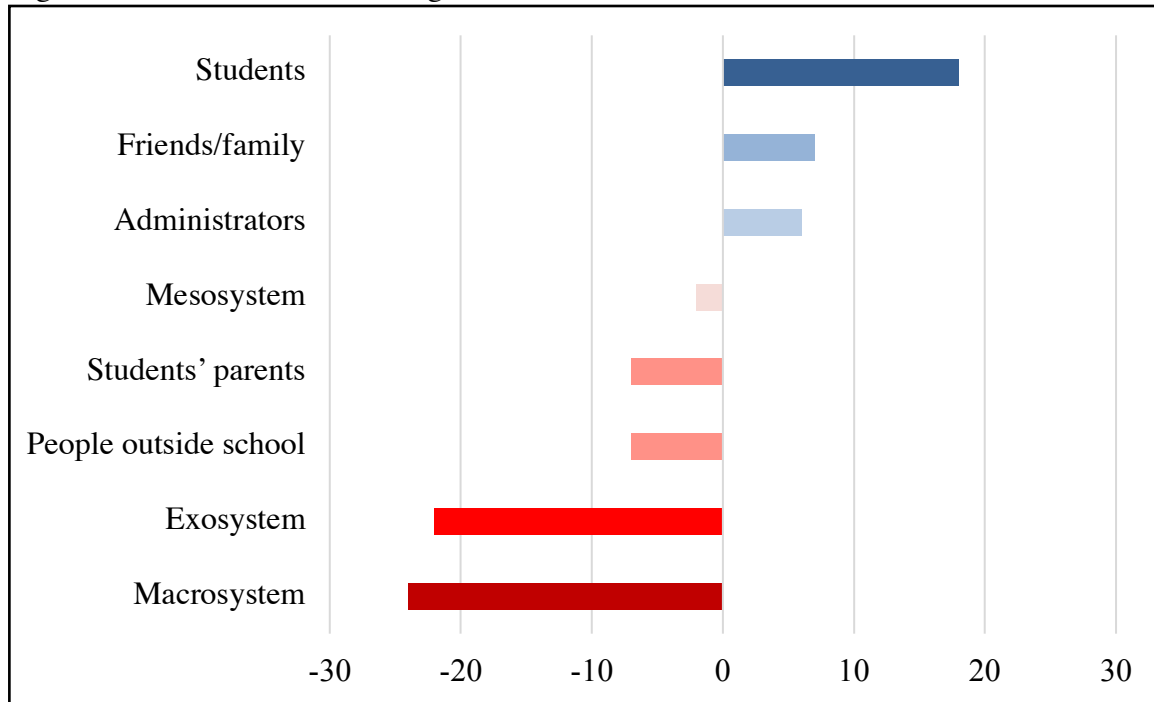
Table 6. Prevalence of Attitudes Across Focal Contexts/Elements

	Negative themes	Positive themes	Prevalence
<b>Students' parents</b>	32	25	57
<b>Administrators</b>	21	27	48
<b>Macrosystem</b>	35	11	46
<b>Family/Friends</b>	17	24	41
<b>Ind. outside school</b>	22	15	37
<b>Students</b>	4	22	26
<b>Exosystem</b>	22	0	22
<b>Mesosystem</b>	11	9	20
<b>Other teachers</b>	3	3	6

In addition to prevalence, I examined what I am calling *balance*, or the difference between the number of positive and negative attitudes associated with each element of context (see Figure 2). Balance provides an impression of whether a contextual element was more often associated with positive or negative attitudes about teachers. Based on this computation, I determined that the macrosystem and exosystem had respective balance scores of -24 and -22, meaning that these contexts were associated with far more negative than positive attitudes. Students' parents (-7), individuals outside of school (-7), and the mesosystem (-2) all skewed slightly negative as well. The contextual element most often associated with positive attitudes was students (18), followed by friends and family (7),

and administrators (6). In what follows, I provide a more detailed description the contexts in which participants discussed each of attitudinal theme.

Figure 2. Balance of Positive/Negative Attitudes Perceived in Each Context



### Contextualizing Positive Attitudes

In general, participants' perceptions of positive attitudes were concentrated in the microsystem. In fact, almost 85% of positive attitudes were contextualized in the microsystem; and more than 40% were contextualized specifically in interactions with administrators and students' parents. A small set of comments were contextualized in the mesosystem, accounting for 7% of references to positive attitudes; and a slightly larger set was attributed to the macrosystem (8%). However, the exosystem (e.g., politicians, education legislation, media) was not included in the discussion of positive attitudes whatsoever. Considering the absence of the exosystem and the relatively limited discussion of the meso- and macrosystems, it appeared that the participants perceived positive

attitudes about teaching predominantly in their interactions certain groups of individuals (see Table 4).

### ***Contextualizing Trusting and Supportive Attitudes***

Participants perceived administrators to be their primary sources of *Trusting/supportive* attitudes. In fact, 13 participants contextualized *Trusting and supportive* attitudes in their interactions with administrators. For example, Corrine had completed an undergraduate teacher preparation program for teaching history, although she had not been able to pass the history licensing exam at that time. She explained that in her district, administrators can request,

a waiver for a teacher that they want to continue to teach there as long as you're working towards getting the certification...[My] first three years teaching special ed, I was lucky to get a waiver every single year, which is not, I don't think, very typical.

Corrine's administrators trusted that she would complete her certification, and they supported her in the interim until she was able to do so.

Interactions with students' parents were the other common site at which *trusting/supportive* attitudes were perceived (8). Marcus explained that the teachers in his school work diligently to earn the trust and support of their students' parents. He stated, "[We] have a lot of outreach. We want to talk to the parents a lot, so we get them to buy in and help out." Clarissa and Helen also discussed teachers' role in earning trust and support from parents. Generally, however, participants who contextualized *trusting/supportive* attitudes in their interactions with parents perceived these attitudes to be natural or normal for many parents in their districts.

### *Contextualizing Appreciative Attitudes*

Unlike *trusting/supportive* attitudes, which were contextualized almost exclusively in relationships with those individuals with whom teachers regularly negotiated trust (i.e., administrators and students' parents), *appreciative* attitudes were conveyed across a wider variety of contexts. The most frequently referenced contexts for *appreciative* attitudes were interactions with students and their parents, which respectively accounted for 27.9% and 23.2% of all references to *appreciative* attitudes (see Table 4). For example, when Farrah was discussing her relationships with students, she offered, "You'll have students come back and talk to you and tell you, you know, 'Thank you for introducing me to this book' or, 'Thank you for helping me or believing in me'..." When Dustin was asked how students' parents seemed to view teachers at his school, he spoke of his own experiences, saying, "...[Any] time I had Christmas, birthday, anything, they [students' parents] are really showing me, 'Hey, you're appreciated and we really like what you're doing.'" Taken together, students and their parents accounted for more than half of all references to *appreciative* attitudes toward teachers.

However, almost 20% of references to *appreciative* attitudes were contextualized in participants' interactions with individuals outside of school, whereas 13.0% were contextualized in interactions with administrators, and 10.9% were contextualized in interactions with friends and family. An additional 6.5% of references were contextualized in the macrosystem, including Tess' comment that, "...[For] the most part, people...are glad that there are people like us." Tess, along with the other two participants who described *appreciative* attitudes in the macrosystem, perceived appreciation of teachers to be broadly accepted as a social norm.



### ***Contextualizing Respectful Attitudes***

References to *respectful* attitudes toward teachers, much like *appreciative* attitudes, were spread across many contexts, including a small number of references to the mesosystem (2) and macrosystem (3). Once again, however, the vast majority of references to *respectful attitudes* were contextualized within the microsystem. Specifically, interactions with administrators (8) and students' parents (7) were the contexts in which *respectful attitudes* were referenced most frequently. For example, when Marcus was asked how administrators at his school seemed to view the teachers, he responded concisely, "Very, very respectfully." When Corrine was asked a similar question regarding students' parents' view of teachers, she replied, "...They respect us to do and they expect us to do the right thing."

There were also five participants who contextualized *respectful* attitudes in interactions with individuals outside of school. Keith, for instance, stated, "...[You] find a lot of people who either have done it or their parents did it, and you can tell they have the highest respect for the field." Interactions with students were mentioned by four participants as a context in which *respectful attitudes* were conveyed; however, such instances typically were vague or general.

### ***Contextualizing Positive Occupational Attitudes about Teaching as a Career***

Positive *occupational* attitudes pertained to teaching as a career, and these attitudes were most often contextualized in friends' and family members' reactions to the participants' decisions to become teachers. As a result, references to *occupational* attitudes were largely retrospective, and therefore they were not contextualized in interactions with administrators or students' parents. Instead, the participants contextualized positive attitudes about teaching as a career in their interactions with friends and family and with students, as well as in the mesosystem and macrosystem

Interactions with friends and family were, by far, the most frequently referenced contexts in which positive *occupational* attitudes about teaching were conveyed. In fact, half of all references to *occupational* attitudes (11 of 22) were situated in interactions with friends and family. For example, when Valerie was asked how her family reacted when she told them she was going to become a teacher, she recalled, “They were just kind of like, ‘That makes a lot of sense. That sounds like the right thing. You should do that.’” Valerie’s family saw her decision to become a drama teacher as a positive choice.

Less commonly endorsed contexts of *occupational* attitudes included interaction with students and the macrosystem. Three participants contextualized positive *occupational* attitudes in their interactions with students. Specifically, they described conversations in which students had expressed the desire to become teachers. Another five participants described positive *occupational* attitudes as part of the macrosystem. In particular, they described a broadly accepted cultural belief that teaching is intrinsically rewarding.

### **Contextualizing Negative Attitudes**

Whereas participants’ perceptions of positive attitudes had been highly concentrated in the microsystem, perceptions of negative attitudes and beliefs were contextualized across all levels of participants’ bioecological systems. In fact, the macrosystem was the most frequently cited context, accounting for 21.3% of all references to negative attitudes. By contrast, only 8.5% of references to positive attitudes had been contextualized in the macrosystem. In addition, participants contextualized 13.4% of negative attitudes in the exosystem, although they did not contextualize any positive attitudes in the exosystem. These differences are noteworthy in light of the fact that the exosystem and macrosystem represent superordinate systems that shape the attitudes of

individuals in local contexts. Thus, it appears that the participants perceived there to be more negative than positive attitudes about teachers embedded in the norms of the dominant culture in the United States. Despite this increase in references to the exosystem and macrosystem, nearly 60% of references to negative attitudes and beliefs were contextualized in the microsystem (see Table 6 for proportions of each negative attitudes attributed to each context).

### ***Contextualizing Adversarial Attitudes***

In looking at *adversarial* attitudes toward teachers, it is unsurprising that nearly 45% of references were contextualized in interactions with students' parents. In fact, thirteen participants described experiences in which students' parents had conveyed *adversarial* attitudes. For example, when Allison was asked if anything had ever happened at school that made her feel bad about being teacher, she shared, "It's mainly been a few parents over the years. It's never been anybody on staff or administration." She went on to describe an experience she had with an *adversarial* parent:

I had one crazy mom, and I would say crazy is probably diagnostic...You know, she went from one teacher to the next playing this one was in the dog house, this one's in the dog house. And when it got to be my turn she emailed everybody up and down the administration, all the way to the superintendent and said all kinds of things about me...

Although Allison reported that she "got no blame" for this situation, the experience took a toll on her. She recalled thinking, "Look lady, I don't need this, you know? And at that point, I even thought to myself, 'Do I really need this?'" In asking herself if she "really need[s] this," Allison seemed to imply that the experience of being targeted by this *adversarial* parent pushed Allison to reflect on whether or not she wanted to continue teaching at all.

In Allison's case, administrators stood by her when she faced an *adversarial* parent. However, four participants contextualized *adversarial* attitudes in their interactions with administrators. In most of cases, these *adversarial* attitudes were perceived to be inherent to an administrator's management style. In one such case, Joy described an executive director in her district as, "basically a sociopathic tyrant." She added, "That probably sounds like an exaggeration [but] I mean, she's verbally abusive. She makes people cry...There is a very strong sense of fear among the people who work under her." Dustin, on the other hand, did not perceive his administrators to hold *adversarial* attitudes toward all teachers, but instead saw himself personally as the subject of administrators' *adversarial* attitudes. He expressed, "I feel like sometimes there's almost a target on my back as a male teacher..." Overall, however, interactions with administrators that were perceived as evincing *adversarial* attitudes tended to be somewhat extreme or atypical, as was the case for Joy and Dustin.

Six participants contextualized *adversarial* attitudes in the macrosystem, meaning that participants perceived *adversarial* attitudes to be broadly accepted or enacted in society. A number of participants connected *adversarial* attitudes to the emergence of extreme ideologies following the 2016 presidential election. Keith stated, "I think the whole field [of teaching] is kind of feeling a nervousness right now about the country's perceptions of intellectuals in general...I don't know why there seems to be a lot of contempt for the teaching field." In a similar vein, Emily explained, "I do think there's a definite group that have chips on their shoulders about...how teachers make too much money, and [they] buy into the whole Trump-like breaking of the unions and that kind of thing." Calvin shared a similar perspective when he stated, "I am fearful for my profession on a grander scale, but I'm still happy that I do what I do every day. It's just I didn't think the fight to keep that a reality would be so tough." For many participants, the perceived

ideological shift that came with the 2016 presidential election was associated with an increase in *adversarial* attitudes toward teachers.

### ***Contextualizing Demeaning Attitudes***

The largest number of participants contextualized *demeaning* attitudes in their interactions with people outside of school. Almost one quarter of references to *demeaning* attitudes were perceived in conversations with individuals in non-academic settings. For example, Clarissa shared, “[A] lot of people in the medical profession are like, ‘Oh, you’re a teacher? Poor you.’” Farrah expressed a similar sense that in her interactions outside of school, she perceived largely *demeaning* attitudes that devalue her work. She explained, “Some people are like, ‘Well thank you for doing that,’ but it doesn’t seem like they really value it, you know? Even though most people are like, ‘No, education is important...But the teachers? Why?’” In fact, thirteen of the participants shared similar stories about people outside of school who had conveyed *demeaning* attitudes toward teachers.

*Demeaning* attitudes were also contextualized frequently in interactions with students’ parents (16%) and friends and family members (16%). The nature of the interactions in which students’ parents were perceived as *demeaning* teachers varied depending on the demographics and location of the school, as well as the demographics of the participant, a point I will address in more detail in the final section of this chapter. Jeff explained, “There is different ways [*sic*] in which I feel disrespected as a teacher sometimes, whether it’s that I’m getting yelled at or I’m being ignored.” Friends and family members, on the other hand, were perceived to demean the profession through what they said about teaching in general as opposed to how they treated teachers. Joy recalled being a senior at a competitive magnet high school and knowing that she wanted to go to college to become a teacher. She reflected,

[When] it became clear that I was making choices about what college to go to based on my desire to pursue [teaching], I got a lot of negative feedback from my parents as far as, like, “You’re selling yourself short.”

Although friends and family members had not been perceived as *adversarial* toward teachers, their discourse about teaching often was perceived by participants as *demeaning* the profession.

The macrosystem and exosystem were prevalent as well in participants’ discussion of *demeaning* attitudes toward teachers. In fact, 20% of all references to *demeaning* attitudes were contextualized as part of U.S. ideology or culture (i.e., macrosystem). Another 11% of references to *demeaning* attitudes were contextualized within the exosystem, including comments about how education legislation and policy, including the structure of teacher pay schedules, demean the profession by devaluing teachers and the work that they do. Denise, who had taught in Japan and the United Kingdom earlier in her career, recognized *demeaning* attitudes associated with the macrosystem and exosystem in the United States. She said that when she tells Americans that she is a teacher,

...[They] are always kind of like, “Oh, that’s so nice.” But they know how you get paid like shit and you get your months off and you can see the judgmental-ness in the background almost. Whereas when I was in Japan, it was, “Oh my gosh! You’re a teacher? Fantastic! Wow, we’re so impressed!”

Denise connected *demeaning* attitudes toward teaching with American culture, and *respectful* attitudes towards teaching with Japanese culture, thereby contextualizing attitudes in the macrosystem. In addition, she highlighted teacher pay as a component that informs and reveals American attitudes toward teachers, thus implicating the exosystem, in that teacher pay is based on salary schedules determined by local and state politicians.

### ***Contextualizing Unprofessional Attitudes***

Unlike *demeaning attitudes*, which were contextualized across all eight of the contextual elements, *unprofessional attitudes* were described within only five contexts

including two elements of the microsystem. Presumably, *unprofessional* attitudes were contextualized frequently in interactions with administrators and students' parents for much the same reason that *trusting/supportive* attitudes pertained almost exclusively to these two parties. Professional respect can be afforded or withheld by individuals who interact in an occupational/professional context (i.e., the school). As such, more than 36% of references to *unprofessional* attitudes were contextualized in interactions with administrators, and more than 22% were contextualized in interactions with students' parents. For example, Dustin perceived that, "administrators can see teachers as almost this pawn off. 'Well, what are we going to do? We don't have enough money to be able to support this. Oh, we'll just give more students to them [the teachers].'" In this instance, Dustin demonstrated his belief that administrators view teachers as tools at their disposal instead of as professionals executing the essential functions of the school.

Interestingly, 11% of reference to *unprofessional* attitudes were contextualized in the mesosystem and macrosystem, and more than 19% were contextualized in the exosystem. The mesosystem, which involves interactions between members of an individual's microsystem and typically including contexts like the community or the district, became relevant in participants' discussion of *unprofessional* attitudes due to the participants' perceptions that structures governing the power dynamics in the school or district de-professionalized teachers by minimizing their voice(s) as stakeholders in the school. For example, Kristina stated,

I think in the list of constituencies that administrators have to respond to and be attuned to, I think we [teachers] are at the bottom. I think, like, school committee, parents, students, outside forces—meaning what is the media saying about us?...What articles are written? What does the state think of our school? What does the ranking say? That group—and taxpayers all rank above us.

Kristina perceived that administrators would not recognize the teachers as partners in running the school despite the teachers' intimate knowledge of what is or is not working in their classrooms.

Instances of *unprofessional* attitudes contextualized in the exosystem were somewhat similar, particularly when referring to education legislation and policy crafted by policy makers who were perceived as having no respect for or awareness of teachers' expertise. As Dustin described, "You [a policy maker] go to teachers and you're like, 'What should we be doing for kids? You see children every day. Oh, fuck you. You don't know what you're talking about.' That happens all the time." *Unprofessional* attitudes looked somewhat different, however, in the context of the macrosystem. In the macrosystem, participants described a "very well-entrenched belief that teaching isn't a profession" (a quote from Jeff). Denise, Jeff, and Keith drew connections between this view of teaching and the general public perception of summer vacation. As Denise explained,

I think that if we were getting the same time off that everybody else got off...it would put us on the professional level with everyone else. [But] we're getting this extra time. I think it throws us into a non-professional kind of status.

According to Denise, cultural attitudes about summer vacation informed cultural attitudes toward teaching as a sub- or semi-professional occupation.

### ***Contextualizing Stereotypical Attitudes and Misconceptions of Teaching***

Participants described *stereotypes* of teachers within seven contexts. Nearly one-third of references were contextualized in the macrosystem. It is likely that the prevalence of references to the macrosystem was the result of a sub-set of interview questions in which participants were asked three questions about beliefs of the general public: (a) *What do non-teachers in general believe to be the most rewarding or enjoyable thing about being a teacher?*; (b) *What do non-teachers in general believe to be the most difficult or*



*challenging thing about being a teacher?*; and (c) *What do non-teachers in general believe makes someone a good teacher?* (see Appendix for full interview protocol). Although some participants responded to these questions by sharing anecdotes contextualized in the microsystem, the vast majority of responses contained broad generalization about commonly held beliefs about teachers and teaching.

The majority of *stereotypes* contextualized in the macrosystem involved beliefs about teaching as “cushy,” (e.g., easy; ample perks and benefits; short work day; excessive vacation time). Regarding this particular stereotypical belief, Keith said, “I don’t think many [non-teachers] understand that a lot of times teachers’ complaints about the field are designed to make us more effective as teachers, as opposed to just wanting to kick our feet up.” He went on to explain that one year, “by a fluke,” he had been given an extra prep period and, as “opposed to, you know, taking a longer lunch or stuff like that, I just prepped more and taught better lessons.” Keith perceived there to be *stereotypes* within the macrosystem that depict teaching as easy and teachers as freeloaders who take advantage of their “cushy” job.

*Stereotypes* about the quality or effectiveness of U.S. public school teachers were also contextualized frequently in the macrosystem, such as when Marcus shared his sense that, “a lot of people have that perception...that their teachers didn’t want to apply themselves to something else. They just want to rehash this very basic information over and over again.” He continued,

But I think the reality is so far from that. I mean, it’s insane. I like to say we do a year’s worth of work in 187 days. So, you know, we get the summers off...but when we are at work we are working really, really hard.

Marcus, like Keith, used his own experiences to illustrate the inaccuracy of a broadly accepted *stereotype* of teachers.

Overall, 18% of references to *stereotypes* were contextualized in the exosystem, and references to the exosystem involved two topics: media and education policy making. Five participants discussed the role of media in perpetuating *stereotypes* of teachers. For example, Farrah commented,

I hate how many representations there are of those teachers that like their students or have an inappropriate relationship with their students. And in reality, does it happen? Yes. But...I feel like it doesn't happen that often, so it's kind of blown out of proportion...And most teachers are like... "We would never see children that way."

There were also four teachers who perceived that education legislation and policy making was informed by *stereotypes* about teaching. Allison stated, ...[We] have a bunch of idiots in Austin that have no clue, and they're passing all the laws..." As an example, she explained that,

...[The] 8th grade STAR test is written on the 13th grade level, so it's a catch-22 because you've got the public expecting us to perform miracles, and the legislature acting like what they're telling us to do makes sense, so it's our fault that it's not working and so we're going to get criticized for it.

For Allison, as for other participants, policy makers' lack of understanding of what students and teachers are able to accomplish and what it means to be successful in the classroom leads to the creation of policies that set up teachers and students to fail, and to confirm the stereotype that U.S. teachers are ineffective.

Looking at the microsystem, eight participants contextualized *stereotypes* in their interactions with people outside of school; six contextualized *stereotypes* in interactions with friends and family; and two contextualized *stereotypes* in interactions with administrators and with students' parents. Considering participants' focus on students' parents and administrators as contexts of negative attitudes, it was reassuring that these groups were referenced less often in discussions of *stereotypes*. Instead, participants most

frequently referenced interactions with individuals outside as school as the context for *stereotypes* of teachers.

As had been true for the macrosystem, the majority of *stereotypes* contextualized in interactions with people outside of school involved the belief that teaching is “cushy.” When Valerie was asked how people respond when she tells them that she is a teacher, she said,

[There] is always the backhanded like, “Oh your job is so easy,” or those little remarks people will tend to make. The, “I wish I was a teacher so I could go home at 2:30 and never work in the summer.”

Still others described uncomfortable interactions outside of school in which stereotypical beliefs about teachers were expressed. Corrine explained, “I’m just a fun little ball of energy, and when people find out I teach high school English, they’re like, ‘Oh, I thought maybe you’d teach kindergarten or first grade or second grade.’” Corrine was one of four participants who said that people outside of school routinely expressed surprise to hear that she was a high school teacher because she violated their stereotypes for high school teachers and more closely fit their stereotypes of elementary teachers.

Unlike Corrine and Valerie, who had reported that strangers expressed stereotypical beliefs, there were six participants who contextualized *stereotypes* in their interactions with friends and family members. Once again, the majority of friends’ and family members’ *stereotypes* involved the belief that teaching is “cushy.” Lynne shared, “I think the perceptions among some of my siblings are that I get my summers off, I don’t work that hard.” On the other hand, Emily, a technology teacher in an urban middle school, shared, “My friends who are teachers up in Maine and these tiny schools, they just have the opinion that I’m getting combat pay. That I make so much more money than they do.” Emily’s friends were teachers, so they knew that Emily’s job was not easy; however, they believed

urban education to be a more lucrative, “cushy” opportunity of which Emily took advantage.

### **VARIATION IN PERCEPTIONS OF ATTITUDES TOWARD TEACHING**

In this section, I will address participants’ thoughts, feelings, and responses to experiences in which beliefs or attitudes about teaching were conveyed. Additionally, I will attend to sources of variation in participants’ experiences and interpretations of others’ beliefs and attitudes. First, I provide an overview of the sources of variation that participants named during the interviews. Next, I focus on a set of comments that many participants reported encountering, and I describe the various ways that participants interpreted and responded to these comments. Finally, I describe patterns in participants’ perceptions of attitudes and beliefs that varied according to demographic, contextual, and sociocultural differences.

#### **Perceived Sources of Variation**

Often, the participants were explicit in distinguishing between groups that had different attitudes toward teachers. In general, participants cited two reasons that attitudes toward teacher or teaching may vary. By looking closely at the participants’ discourse regarding the “vocal minority” of parents who espoused negative attitudes, it became clear that the concept of privilege, be it racial, socioeconomic (SES), or educational, served as a central rally post around which groups of parents with similar attitudes were presumed to coalesce. A number of participants expressed the perception that SES and job status informed the attitudes of people outside of school as well. Among the participants’ friends, family, and administrators, as well as people outside of school, differences in attitudes toward teaching often were attributed to these individuals’ beliefs about the participants’

students or their content area/specialization. These sources of variation are described in detail in the following sections.

### ***Privilege: Race, Socioeconomic Status, and Education***

Overall, eleven participants referred to aspects of privilege in distinguishing between groups of parents with positive and negative attitudes toward teachers (see Table 7). Five participants associated *demeaning* and *adversarial* attitudes with wealthy, “high achieving” parents. Corrine became aware of how SES and demographic differences related to parents’ trust in and professional respect for teachers when she left her current job at an urban technical/vocational high school for a year to work in a wealthier, suburban community. She stated that the parents of her current students,

...are very vocal to me like, “You’re the expert. You know what’s best in the classroom...I trust your decisions in the class.” And I feel like that wasn’t true in [Suburb]. I felt like...whatever the parent said, the teachers had to do.

Denise was more explicit in pointing to wealth/SES as the root of *adversarial* attitudes toward teachers in suburban districts. She asserted that it can be tempting to work in “wealthier” districts that are able to provide teachers with resources, “[but] what comes with that is the parents with the money and the lawyers.” Denise saw special education teachers as a frequent target of wealthy, adversarial parents, particularly in suburban districts.

In the same vein, five participants contextualized positive attitudes toward teachers in their interactions with parents in traditionally disadvantaged or disenfranchised communities. Joy, for instance, commented that “A lot of [parents have the] expectation that your child will be polite and respectful and follow through...They feel like, ‘Well you’re the teacher, so you’re in charge 8:00 to 3:30.’” When asked about the prevalence of this attitude, Joy added, “It is more noticeable in the Hispanic population.” Lynne was

teaching in an affluent suburban district and attributed *appreciative* attitudes to “parents who grew up in city public schools [who] feel very fortunate for what their children are receiving [at the suburban school] in terms of the education from their teachers.” A total of eight teachers commented either on the association between parents’ privilege and negative attitudes toward teachers or the association between parents’ identification with historically disadvantaged communities and positive attitudes toward teachers.

Table 7. Attitudes Associated with Perceptions of Privilege

	Positive Attitudes	Negative Attitudes
<b>Privileged Groups</b>	Dustin Molly	Clarissa Denise Kristina Corrine Helen
<b>Disadvantaged Groups</b>	Corrine Helen Joy Keith Lynne	Emily Keith Molly

Conversely, there was a small group of participants for whom the associations between privilege and parents’ attitudes conflicted with this pattern. Emily and Keith both explained that some parents were *adversarial* toward teachers because of their own unpleasant or even traumatic experiences as students that may have led them to see school in a negative light, and likely left them with more limited, lower paying occupational prospects. Emily stated that parents might have *adversarial attitudes* “if they had any kind of issues in school themselves, if they were in special education programs or had a hard time socially or academically.” Keith reported that some of the *adversarial* parents he encountered had attended his current school, which “used to be almost like a prison...So if you get one of those parents, [they have] this attitude of like, ‘Ugh, these frigging teachers are killing me.’” Both Emily and Keith seemed to justify parents’ *adversarial* attitudes

toward teachers by considering how the parents themselves had been marginalized by the school system.

Molly and Dustin, on the other hand, associated positive attitudes with parents from privileged communities. Molly explained that parents' attitudes toward teachers were "mixed" in her district, and when asked if she noticed any differences between the *appreciative* and *demeaning* parents, she replied, "I hate to put it this way, but it's usually the white kids' parents or the better off kids that their parents are more open to communication." Molly's apologetic tone suggests that she may have had some awareness of the reasons that parents of color and parents who are economically disadvantaged may be less likely to interact directly with the school (see Jacob & Lefgren, 2007). Conversely, Dustin seemed comfortable with his preference for parents of gifted and talented students. He stated, "I like the class that I teach because I like, not gifted and talented students, but I like parents that are involved." Dustin preferred to teach high-achieving students because of the attitudes that their parents would have toward him and his classroom.

### ***Students and Subject Matter***

Participants also perceived variation in attitudes toward teachers based on attitudes toward the students they served or the content they taught. In particular, nine participants perceived that attitudes toward teaching varied according to the student age group. Farrah reported that when she told others that she was a high school teacher, people tended to express pity or convey distaste for her job. Elaborating on why she thought this reaction was so common, she explained, "Because [with] elementary school, they're like, 'Awww.' You know, 'Little kids! Fun, fun, fun!' But high school, it's like 'Oh God, you have to deal with the hormones and emotions.'" Farrah perceived positive attitudes toward elementary school students, which yielded positive attitudes toward elementary teaching as a career;

by contrast, attitudes toward high school students, and therefore high school teaching, were perceived to be negative. Calvin was also a high school teacher, and he agreed that attitudes toward students inform attitudes toward teaching; however, his perception of attitudes toward elementary-aged students was quite different from Farrah's. Calvin stated,

I think a lot of people would think that the biggest challenge to a teacher is just population control, you know? *Especially with the younger grades...* Because people who don't deal with children on a daily basis... a lot of times see kids as, not a nuisance per say, but as a problem to be dealt with rather than a benefit.  
(Emphasis added)

Whereas Farrah perceived there to be positive attitudes toward elementary students, Calvin perceived attitudes toward elementary-aged students to be especially negative such that *stereotypes* existed about the day-to-day demands of being an elementary teacher.

Sometimes participants associated attitudes and beliefs about their work with stereotypes or racist attitudes toward the students they served. This weighed heavily on Joy and Emily, both of whom taught in urban secondary schools that served predominantly students of color (see Figure 1). Joy shared,

[Occasionally] I'll get the, "Oh, [Current School]? Are you wearing a bullet proof vest?" kind of reaction. When that happens, I do very overtly try to flip that because I do care that it's recognized as the generally positive place that it is.

Emily recalled similar conversations in which her friends, who were teachers in Maine, expressed their belief that Emily receives "combat pay" for working in an urban district. Emily reflected, "[They] think [that] just from the news and being afraid of cities in general, and not knowing this place in detail at all, just because it's an urban area." Emily suspected that her friends may have harbored negative attitudes about cities and the people who live there (i.e., people of color), including Emily's students. Emily also expressed that she had been frustrated with a long-time school superintendent for the district who stereotyped the students in his own city. Emily said, "I didn't appreciate him at all, because it was always



‘The poor children of [City].’ Couldn’t do anything. Couldn’t do this or that.’” Emily was disappointed to hear the most powerful figure in the district disparaging the students, conveying beliefs about their inability to succeed, and therefore positing that the teachers would be unable to affect change or help their students.

Other participants talked about their specialization or content area as a source of variation in the attitudes conveyed to them about their work. Denise, for example, who had taught in eight different schools at the time of this study, said, “most times SPED departments are like second class citizens compared to math departments or science departments.” Thus, within the mesosystem of the school and district, special education teachers were afforded less respect than their colleagues in content-based classrooms. On the other hand, Helen perceived there to be consequential misconceptions about her content area. She explained,

I don’t think people understand English teachers at all. I don’t think they understand how much grading it is... And sure, other classes do have their share of grading... but it’s not a ten-page paper or a four-page creative writing piece, and it’s not a persuasive analysis. It’s so hard [and] I don’t think people understand that at all.

For Helen, misconceptions about the demands of teaching English led English teachers to face unfair and unrealistic expectations from administrators, students, and students’ parents.

### **Differences in Interpretation of Attitudes Toward Teaching**

A number of common interactions, conversations, and discursive patterns were reported by many participants across the sample. Often, however, participants interpreted or responded to these common dialogues in different ways. The most commonly reported interactions occurred when a participant told others that she/he was a teacher. Ten participants reported receiving responses akin to, “I could never be a teacher.” These

statements were accompanied by at least one of three attitudes or beliefs: anti-child attitudes, reverence for teachers, or aversion (e.g., too demanding, low paying). What was most interesting about “I could never...” statements, however, is that participants varied in whether they interpreted such messages as reflecting positive or negative attitudes toward the profession. (See Table 8 for participants’ interpretations and explanation of “I could never...” messages.)

Table 8. Interpretations of “I Could Never...” Utterances

<b>Interpretation</b>	<b>Reasons Given for Why One Could Never be a Teacher</b>		
	<b>Anti-child attitude</b>	<b>Reverence</b>	<b>Aversion</b>
<b>Positive</b>	Allison Kristina	Helen Tess Lynne	Emily Kristina
<b>Negative</b>	Clarissa Farrah		Farrah Lynne
<b>Unspecified</b>	Dustin		
<b>Ambivalent</b>	Molly		

### ***Positive Interpretations***

Seven of the ten participants who described encounters with “I could never...” messages interpreted them as reflecting positive attitudes toward teachers. Moreover, positive interpretations were made for all three of the explanations non-teachers gave for why they could not teach. Allison and Kristina attributed positive attitudes to non-teachers who had cited anti-child attitudes as the reason they could not teach. Kristina explained that when she has revealed that she is a teacher, “...Fifty percent of people react like, ‘Oh, good for you. I could never do that.’” When I asked Kristina to share her thoughts about why so many people said they could never teach, she responded, “I think it’s the idea of kids that is overwhelming to people.” She went on explain that she feels validated when

she received these kinds of reactions. Even Allison reported that she had been called “crazy” for choosing to teach junior high school students, yet she perceived that her job “never comes up in a negative way.”

Helen and Tess described instances in which non-teachers said that they could not teach due to their reverence for teachers, who were described as saintly or somehow special. When Helen was asked how people respond when she says that she is a teacher, she stated, “I would say most often I get, ‘Oh wow, I could never do that.’ You know... ‘That’s so honorable.’” Tess said that when people find out that she is a teacher, “They always say, ‘Bless you, because I couldn’t do it.’ Or they say, ‘Thank you. It takes a patient person to do that.’ It’s always positive. It’s never negative.” It is unsurprising that expressions of reverence were associated with positive attitudes toward teachers.

However, it was somewhat surprising that two participants made positive interpretations of statements in which non-teachers said that they could never be teachers because of their aversion to teaching in light of teachers’ low salaries or because the work itself was unappealing. When Kristina was asked about typical response she has received after revealing that she is a teacher, she noted, “People react with awe that you’re a teacher. Like, ‘I could never do that because *I could never work that hard for that little pay*,’ ...I think it does make me feel good about [becoming a teacher]” (emphasis added). This response, which focused on the fact that teachers are undercompensated for the amount of work that they do, makes teachers out to be quasi-martyrs, and Kristina felt validated and proud when such attitudes were conveyed to her.

### ***Negative and Ambivalent Interpretations***

Two participants interpreted “I could never...” message as containing negative attitudes toward teachers. For Clarissa, it was not the statement of “I could never teach”

that was offensive, but rather the fact that such messages were premised on anti-child attitudes. She explained, “a lot of people have become intolerant towards children, because I hear that a lot. Like, ‘Oh, better you than me. I couldn’t be around kids that long.’ I think that’s crazy to me.” Farrah, a high school teacher, expressed her perception that attitudes toward elementary education is positive, whereas individuals said they “could never” teach high school because they would never want to work with teenagers. When asked how she responds to such comments, Farrah said, “Y’all, shut up. Just because you would never want to [teach], please don’t express that feeling.” Clearly, Farrah was offended when non-teachers expressed that they would not want to become teachers because of their negative attitudes toward high school students. However, Farrah also interpreted as negative those messages in which aversion and the general undesirability of teaching were used as explanations for why someone could never be a teacher. When asked how people tended to react when she revealed that she was a teacher, Farrah explained, “There are a lot of people who are like, ‘I could *never* do that. I would *never* want to do that.’... You know? That’s not your first knee-jerk reaction to other things that people do.” Farrah perceived teaching to be unlike other occupations in that it is deemed as acceptable to tell teachers that their career is undesirable.

Two participant, Molly and Lynne, made ambivalent interpretations of “I could never...” messages. When Molly was asked how people tend to respond when she says that she is a teacher, she stated, “for the most part it’s pretty [much] like, ‘Oh, I don’t know how you do it.’ Or, ‘Oh, how do you teach that age level?’ Not necessarily good or bad. It’s kind of in-between sometimes.” In general, Molly perceived “I could never...” messages to be tied to anti-child attitudes toward high school students, and she was ambivalent in her interpretations of these messages, which were “Not necessarily good or bad.” In Lynne’s case, ambivalence meant that she interpreted some “I could never...”

messages as positive and others as negative depending on the reason a non-teacher provided for her/his inability to teach. Specifically, Lynne said that she felt good when these statements were based on reverence, such as when she was told, “‘Oh you’re such a saint!’ Or, ‘Oh I could never do that.’” However, Lynne expressed some annoyance regarding instances in which “I could never...” messages were associated with how little teachers are paid. She noted, “...[Some] people have that reaction like I’m doing this huge service to the world and I don’t get paid. I’m like, ‘No I get paid.’ But a lot of people too, they don’t get it.” As was true for Clarissa, Lynne found “I could never...” message in and of themselves to be neither positive or negative; however, the reasons non-teachers gave for why they could not teach determined the valence of her interpretation.

#### **CONTEXTUAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC VARIATION IN ATTITUDES PERCEIVED**

Information about participants’ demographics, teaching context, and teaching background was collected as part of this study. I investigated trends and tendencies in participants’ perceptions of attitudes toward teachers across a number of these factors. Specifically, I looked for evidence of relations between participants’ perceptions and their demographic characteristics, background as teachers, and their teaching contexts.

##### **Demographic Characteristics**

A number of interesting differences between male and female participants’ perceptions suggested that gender may shape teachers’ perceptions of attitudes toward teachers and the teaching profession. However, the small sample size, and small number of men in particular, precludes me from making generalizations about the impact of gender on teachers at large. This applies as well to differences between the perceptions of the women of color who participated in this study and their white counterparts. With regards to this sample, there are clear differences between racial groups, although the small sample

of teachers of color constrains my ability to make generalization. Nonetheless, in the following sections, I describe the gender and racial differences in perceptions of attitudes that were identified in this sample of teachers.

### ***Gender Differences in Perceptions of Attitudes toward Teachers***

Larger proportions of women than men contextualized positive attitudes toward teachers in interactions with administrators. Specifically, this pertained to *appreciative* and *trusting/supportive* attitudes. In fact, nearly half of all female participants (6 of 13) perceived *appreciative* attitudes in their interactions with administrators, whereas none of the male participants described administrators as *appreciative* of teachers. In terms of *trusting/supportive attitudes*, two men described administrators as conveying such attitudes, whereas 11 of the 13 female participants' (85%) contextualized *trusting/supportive* attitudes in their interactions with administrators.

Male participants also attributed negative attitudes to administrators in greater numbers than their female peers. For example, 60% of male participants (3 out of 5) contextualized *adversarial* attitudes in interactions with administrators, yet only one of the 13 (8%) female participants did so. A similar pattern pertained to *unprofessional* attitudes, which were attributed to administrators by all five of the male participants and only 62% (8 out of 13) of the female participants.

Not only did a larger proportion of male participants attribute *unprofessional attitudes* to administrators, but the pattern pertained in the distal contexts as well (i.e., exosystem and macrosystem). *Unprofessional* attitudes were contextualized in the exosystem by 80% of male participants (4 out of 5) and 23% of the female participants (3

out of 13); and they were contextualized in the macrosystem by 40% of male participants (2 out of 5) compared to 15% of female participants (2 out of 13).

### ***Racial Differences in Perceptions of Unprofessional Attitudes***

A similar pattern appeared along racial lines. However, only three teachers of color were included in the study, each of whom identified differently in terms of race; thus, any discussion of racial differences in participants' perceptions of attitudes toward teachers is highly tentative and is not intended to generalize to any population beyond this sample. That being said, it may be noteworthy that the participants of color did not address *unprofessional* attitudes in the same way as white participants. Only one of the three participants of color referred to *unprofessional* attitudes (contextualized in an interaction with an administrator). Beyond this single comment, the participants of color did not address *unprofessional* attitudes whatsoever. Among white participants, however, it was one of the most commonly cited themes. Twelve of the fifteen white participants (80%) contextualized *unprofessional* attitudes in their interactions with administrators, and eight of fifteen contextualized them in interactions with students' parents. In fact, there was only one white participant (Farrah) who did not attribute *unprofessional* attitudes to either administrators or students' parents. Farrah was one of the seven white participants who referred to *unprofessional* attitudes in the exosystem however. Four white participants referred to *unprofessional* attitudes with the meso- and macrosystems as well.

Although any findings related to racial differences in perceptions of attitudes must be interpreted cautiously, there does appear to be some evidence that *unprofessional* attitudes were focal attitudes among white participants, particularly when contextualized in interactions with administrators and students' parents. This makes sense in light of the

racialized history of “professionalism,” which will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 5.

### **Differences in Teaching Background**

In investigating sources of variation in participants’ interpretations of attitudes toward teaching, I also considered two characteristics of their backgrounds as teachers. This included a comparison of participants who had teachers in their families and those who did not. I also compared the perceptions of participants who had careers prior to becoming teachers (i.e., *second-career teachers*) and those for whom teaching is their first and only career (i.e., *career teachers*).

#### ***Teachers in the Family***

I was surprised to find that a larger proportion of participants without teachers in their families (10 of 11) contextualized *appreciative* attitudes in their interactions with students, compared to just three of seven participants who did have teachers in their families. Moreover, all seven of the participants with teachers in their families perceived *adversarial* attitudes in their interactions with students’ parents, compared to only 55% (6 of 11) of the participants without teachers in their families. As such, it appeared that participants without teachers in their families were somewhat more likely to perceive positive attitudes in their interactions with students and their families.

However, examination of participants’ perceptions of *unprofessional* attitudes and *stereotypes* complicated this apparent association between perceptions of negative attitudes and growing up around teachers. In looking at participants’ references to *unprofessional* attitudes, I found that 55% of participants without teachers in their families (6 of 11) contextualized *unprofessional* attitudes in the exosystem, as compared to just 14% of participants with teachers in their families (1 of 7). In other words, more of the participants



who grew up without teachers in their family interpreted *unprofessional* attitudes toward teachers in media messages and educational policy. However, a larger proportion of participants with teachers in their families (6 of 7) contextualized *stereotypes* in the macrosystem, meaning that they perceived there to be pervasive misconceptions and stereotypes of teachers embedded in U.S. ideology and culture. Although it is difficult to recognize why or how these perceptions might relate to the presence or absence of a teacher in the family, the differences were pronounced enough that they bear consideration.

### ***Career Teachers versus Second-Career Teachers***

Another factor of the participants' backgrounds as teachers was whether or not they had careers prior to becoming teachers. Although the length of their careers and the seriousness with which they pursued said careers varied, seven of the participants were *second-career teachers*, having worked in other fields before becoming teachers (see Table 2). For example, Allison had been a lawyer for a number of years before transitioning to be a full-time homemaker, only to become a teacher once her children were grown. Valerie, on the other hand, had worked as a dog-walker and a waitress while she pursued an acting career for a few years. Despite the range in their experiences, it appeared that having experience in a career prior to teaching may have influenced participants' interpretations of attitudes toward teaching. Specifically, more second-career teachers than career teachers perceived *appreciative* attitudes across a number of contexts including administrators (57% versus 18%), people outside of school (71% versus 36%), and friends and family (57% versus 9%). Moreover, all of the participants who contextualized positive *occupational* attitudes in their interactions with students were second-career teachers.

Career teachers, however, described more positive *occupational* attitudes attributed to their friends and family. This is somewhat intuitive, as those participants who elected to

become teachers early in their lives may have done so because of the positive attitudes about teaching that were conveyed to them by peers and family members. It is also possible, however, that second-career teachers may have been discouraged from becoming teachers (or encouraged to pursue other career options), such that positive attitudes about teaching as a career would not be conveyed to them by friends and family.

In terms of negative attitudes and beliefs, findings for these groups were somewhat mixed. For example, none of the second-career teachers contextualized *adversarial* attitudes in their interactions with administrators, as compared to 36% of the career teachers (4 of 11). However, *unprofessional* attitudes were contextualized in interactions with administrators by a larger proportion of second-career teachers (86%; 6 of 7) than career teachers (64%; 7 of 11). This may indicate that those who came to teaching from other careers brought with them expectations about how they would be treated and, in particular, how they would be respected as professionals. Thus, second-career teachers may be more sensitive to or aware of the ways that professional respect is withheld from teachers.

A similar phenomenon appeared to be at play regarding *stereotypes* of teachers. The majority of second-career teachers (71%; 5 of 7) contextualized *stereotypes* in interactions with people outside of school, whereas only 27% of career teachers (3 of 11) did so. The second-career teachers often were candid in sharing the stereotypes and misconceptions of teaching that they had believed before they became teachers, and they attributed the same or similar *stereotypes* to those non-teachers with whom they interacted outside school. For instance, Molly had been a veterinary technician before becoming a teacher, and she shared,

[Before] I started teaching, I didn't think a whole lot went into it. But now that I've been in it for three years, I'm like, 'Oh crap,' you know? There's just a lot

that goes into it that I don't think people understand, because I sure didn't understand when I first started.

When Keith, who had worked in the music industry before becoming a teacher, was asked to name skills that the non-teachers generally think teachers should have, he said,

I know when I was a non-teacher, I kind of thought it would be understanding of the material. And even when I started teaching, I thought that was the most important thing and [now] I don't. It's not, in my opinion.

Based on these examples and other reflections from second-career teachers, it seems likely that the participants who had careers prior to becoming teachers may have been more likely to attribute *stereotypes* (or misconceptions) to non-teachers because these participants were able to reflect on what they had believed about teaching in their prior career.

### **Differences in Teaching Context**

Participants' perceptions of attitudes also appeared to vary somewhat based on characteristics of the school and the students participants served. Specifically, I found differences pertaining to school level (i.e., high school, middle school, elementary school), the proportion of students in a school identified (by the state) as economically disadvantaged, community type (i.e., urban, suburban, small town/rural, central city), and the state in which one teaches. In some cases, unbalanced sub-samples make it difficult to make claims about the importance of contextual differences, although a number of these factors appeared to impact participants' perceptions of attitudes toward teachers and the teaching profession.

### ***School-Level Differences***

There were recognizable differences in perceptions of *appreciative*, *respectful*, and *trusting/supportive* attitudes across school levels. *Appreciative* attitudes were contextualized in interactions with administrators by three of the nine high school teachers, three of five middle school teachers, and none of the four elementary school teachers.

Although the proportions of secondary teachers who perceived *appreciative* attitudes from administrators was fairly low, it was surprising that none of the elementary teachers spoke of this type of positive attitude.

Furthermore, six of nine high school teachers (and one of five middle school teachers) perceived *respectful* attitudes in their interactions with students' parents, but once again none of the elementary teachers described students' parents' attitudes as *respectful*. This trend was mirrored for *trusting/supportive* attitudes, with six of the nine high school teachers perceiving students' parents as *trusting/supportive* whereas only one elementary and one middle school teacher did so.

Considering the relatively large proportions of high school teachers who endorsed positive attitudes toward teachers, findings pertaining to their perceptions of negative attitudes were somewhat surprising. Once again, large proportions of high school teachers endorsed negative attitudes. For example, 89% of the high school teachers (eight of nine) perceived *demeaning* attitudes in interactions with people outside school. Only half of the elementary (two of four) and middle school teachers (three of five) reported having such experiences. Moreover, 80% of high school teachers (and 60% of middle school teachers) contextualized *unprofessional* attitudes in interactions with administrators, whereas only two out of four elementary teachers reported having similar experiences.

In light of the unbalanced numbers of participants at each school-level, these findings cannot be generalized to any population, and apply only to the sample itself. Nonetheless, these school-level trends highlight the possibility that high school teachers may be more aware of others' attitudes toward teaching in general, and this would explain why a larger proportion of participants at the high school level cited positive *and* negative attitudes in their interactions with administrators, students' parents, and people outside of school.

### *Differences in Students Served*

I also investigated variation in participants' perceptions of attitudes based on the percentage of students in each school identified as economically disadvantaged (ED). These figures are provided for Texas schools by the TEA (2016) and for Massachusetts schools by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2017a). Although the states use slightly different criteria for identifying students as economically disadvantaged (in Texas, the label applies to students who qualify for free or reduced lunch; In Massachusetts, it applies to students who receive free or reduced lunch and/or participate in SNAP, TAFDC, DCF foster care programs, or Medicaid), data on economically disadvantaged students yield a relatively comparable factor reflecting the socioeconomic conditions within a school.

To compare participants' perceptions based on this characteristic, I divided them into three groups. *Low-poverty* schools serve 0-33% students identified as economically disadvantaged. *Moderate-poverty* schools serve 34-67% students identified as economically disadvantaged, and schools serving at least 68% students identified as economically disadvantaged were considered *high-poverty* schools. Based on this, I found that the majority of participants who contextualized *respectful* attitudes in interactions with students (3 of 4) worked in high-poverty schools; and that the majority of participants who worked in high-poverty schools contextualized *respectful* attitudes in interactions with students (3 out of 5). Moreover, fewer participants from high-poverty school settings contextualized *unprofessional* attitudes in interactions with administrators (2 out of 5) and students' parents (1 out of 5) when compared to participants in low-poverty schools (6 out of 7; 4 out of 7) and moderate-poverty (5 out of 6; 3 out of 6) school settings.

Participants in low-poverty schools also perceived more negative attitudes in their relationships and interactions outside of school. Five out of the seven participants who

worked in low-poverty schools reported that friends or family members had conveyed *demeaning* attitudes about teaching. In comparison, only two moderate-poverty school teachers and two high-poverty school teachers reported such attitudes. A greater proportion of participants in low-poverty schools (six out of seven) also contextualized *demeaning* attitudes in the macrosystem, meaning that they perceived *demeaning* attitudes about teaching to be part of broader U.S. culture or ideology. On the other hand, only three of six teachers in moderate-poverty schools and two of five teachers in high-poverty schools shared this perception.

### ***Community-Type Differences***

Participants' perceptions also appeared to vary somewhat based on the type of community in which they taught (e.g., suburb, urban, small town/rural, central city). In terms of positive attitudes, it appeared that relative to the other community types, a larger proportion of suburban teachers perceived *appreciative* attitudes in their interactions with students' parents and people outside of school. In fact, 80% of suburban teachers (4 out of 5) perceived *appreciative* attitudes from each of these sources, whereas only 44% (4 out of 9) of participants in urban schools reported such attitudes. There was also one participant from a small town/rural school and one from a central city school who reported *appreciative* attitudes from students' parents. However, there were so few participants from each of these community-types that it is difficult to draw comparisons to the suburban and urban teachers.

A somewhat similar trend appeared to described differences in participants' perceptions of *trusting/supportive* attitudes. In this case, two-thirds (6 out of 9) of the combined small town/rural, central city, and suburban participants contextualized *Trusting and supportive* attitudes in their interactions with students' parents. However, only 22% (2

out 9) participants in urban schools attributed *trusting/supportive* attitudes to their students' parents.

Despite the relative prevalence of positive attitudes in suburban teachers' perceptions of interactions with students' parents and people outside of school, they perceived negative attitudes from administrators more than other groups of participants did. In fact, all of the participants in suburban schools contextualized *unprofessional* attitudes in their interactions with administrators, whereas only 56% (5 out of 9) of the urban teachers reported having such experiences.

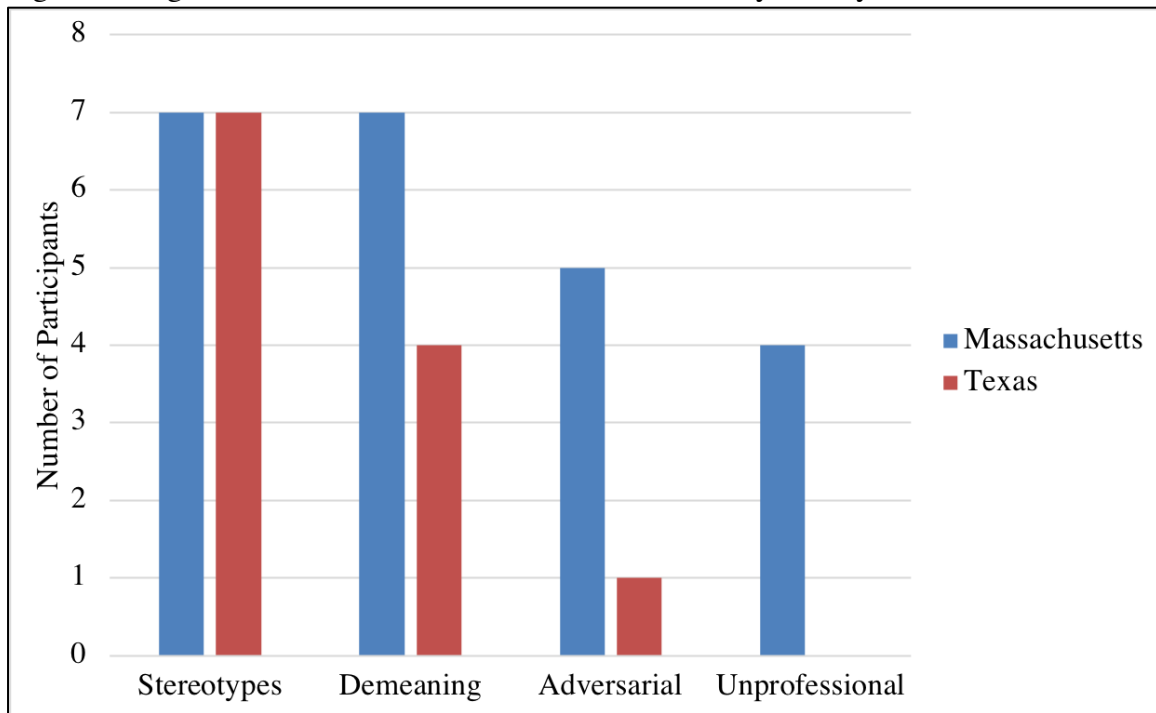
### ***Differences Between the States***

There were recognizable differences between participants' perceptions of attitudes and beliefs about teaching based on the state in which they teach as well. In general, participants from Texas described fewer negative attitudes about teaching. This difference was most pronounced in the context of the macrosystem (see Figure 3). However, participants' perceptions appeared to differ slightly across state lines in terms of two elements of the microsystem as well.

All nine participants from Texas perceived *trusting/supportive* attitudes in interactions with administrators, whereas only four participants from Massachusetts perceived this positive attitude in their experiences with principals or other school leaders. Furthermore, when referencing their negative interactions with people outside of school, six teachers from Massachusetts and only two from Texas described experiences in which *stereotypes* of teachers had been expressed to them. Although these quantities and differences are relatively small considering the size of the sample, when taken together they do align to support the possibility of an overall trend in which teachers in Massachusetts tend to have more negative perceptions of attitudes toward teachers,

whereas teachers in Texas tend to perceive that their profession is viewed in a more positive light.

Figure 3. Negative Attitudes Contextualized in the Macrosystem by State



All nine participants from Texas perceived *trusting/supportive* attitudes in interactions with administrators, whereas only four participants from Massachusetts perceived this positive attitude in their experiences with principals or other school leaders. Furthermore, when referencing their negative interactions with people outside of school, six teachers from Massachusetts and only two from Texas described experiences in which *stereotypes* of teachers had been expressed to them. Although these quantities and differences are relatively small considering the size of the sample, when taken together they do align to support the possibility of an overall trend in which teachers in Massachusetts tend to have more negative perceptions of attitudes toward teachers,



whereas teachers in Texas tend to perceive that their profession is viewed in a more positive light.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

The current study was designed to explore teachers' perceptions of attitudes toward the teaching profession, and to examine the sources of variation in teachers' interpretation of and responses to messages about teachers. In light of the phenomenological approach and exploratory aims of this study, I was interested in examining the experiences of a variety of teachers across diverse contexts in order to represent a range of lived realities. Simultaneously, I explored commonalities in participants' experiences in order to improve the existing understanding of wide-spread phenomena that affect large numbers of U.S. public school teachers.

Despite a vast body of existing social scientific and psychological research on teachers, little attention has been given to the attitudes toward teaching that teachers perceive in their daily interactions. As such, this study offers a new perspective that can inform existing understandings of important psychological outcomes for teachers and students, as well as institutional factors within schools. In analyzing interviews with 18 public school teachers across Texas and Massachusetts, paying particular attention to attitudes they perceived in their interactions and experiences across eight bioecological and interpersonal contexts, I identified eight thematic categories of attitudes and beliefs about teachers and teaching. Positive attitudes pertaining to teachers were *appreciative*, *respectful*, *trusting/supportive*, and reflected positive beliefs about teaching as an occupation (i.e., *occupational attitudes*). Negative attitudes were *adversarial*, *demeaning*, *unprofessional*, and *stereotypical*. In what follows, I contextualize these findings by referring to the existing literature and discuss the relevance of commonalities and differences in attitudes perceived across and within different bioecological and sociocultural contexts.

## COMMON PERCEPTIONS OF ATTITUDES TOWARD TEACHING

Large numbers of participants described similar experience pertaining to four sites of interaction. *Demeaning* attitudes toward teachers and *stereotypes* of teachers were attributed to the general public (i.e., contextualized in the macrosystem); *adversarial* attitudes were attributed to a “vocal minority” of students’ parents; *trusting/supportive* as well as *unprofessional* attitudes toward teachers were attributed to administrators; and *appreciative* attitudes were attributed to students. In the following section, I describe each of these common experiences in more detail before explaining their relevance and implications for various stakeholders in public education.

### **Demeaning Attitudes and Stereotypes as Cultural Norms**

The majority of participants across the sample described the general public, culture, or society as regularly belittling, degrading, or misunderstanding teachers and the realities of teaching. Although this finding is somewhat disheartening, it is predictable in light of OECD findings that only one-third of teachers in the United States believe that teaching is valued by American society (Country Notes, 2014). Hargreaves et al. (2007) recognized a similar pattern in the United Kingdom, where teachers have perceived their occupational status to be continuously declining since 1979.

It is worth noting, however, that Hargreaves et al.’s (2007) findings, as well as my own, reflect teachers’ *perceptions* of attitudes toward their occupation, and it is possible that teachers are supported and extolled to a greater degree than they realize. Nonetheless, teachers’ perceptions that their field generally is demeaned will inform their self-evaluations and beliefs about how they are evaluated by others regardless of the reality. Positive self-evaluation and positive evaluation by others are considered basic needs (Epstein, 1998) and they are strong motivators (Sedikides and Strube, 1997).

In terms of teachers' occupational health, teachers' perceptions of *demeaning* attitudes may manifest in what Semmer, Jacobshagen, Meier, and Elfering (2007) called *stress as offense to self (SOS)*. The SOS model posits that certain "work conditions are perceived as stressful because they threaten people's positive self-view" (Meier, Semmer, & Spector, 2014, p. 168). More precisely, one's self-perception "may be threatened [if] others' behavior...signals disrespect" (p. 169). Thus, if discursive and interactional messages inform a teacher's perception that the general public has *demeaning* attitudes toward teaching, that teacher will experience stress, even if she/he possesses resources and coping skills (Crocker & Park, 2004).

Currently, little is known about the connection between teachers' perceptions of attitudes toward teaching and their level of stress, although the SOS model and existing literature on self-evaluation and evaluation from others support the likelihood of this connection. In that case, teachers' perceptions of *demeaning* cultural/societal attitudes could offer an important avenue for understanding teacher stress, which has received a great deal of attention in light of the many negative outcomes with which it is associated. Stress in general is associated with negative health outcomes, namely cardiovascular morbidity (Felton & Cole, 1963; Israel, Baker, Goldenhar, & Heaney, 1996), as well as depression, anxiety, and insomnia (Ogłńska-Bulik, 2005), as well as migraine headaches and high cholesterol (Cooper & Marshall, 2013) among others. Teacher stress in particular is associated also with absenteeism (Guglielmi & Tatrow, 1998), often due to somatic illnesses that result from chronic stress (Rudow, 1999); and with increased likelihood that a teacher will leave the field (Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1978) without returning (Borg & Riding, 1991).

Negative student and school outcomes are also associated with teacher stress. These outcomes include diminished student motivation (Pakarinen et al., 2010) and poor school

climate (Mehta, Atkins, & Frazier, 2013). Increased teacher stress-related absences and turnover also impact students and schools negatively. Ronfeldt, Loeb, and Wyckoff's (2013) examination of turnover in the New York City school system revealed that "there is a disruptive effect of turnover beyond changing the distribution in teacher quality" (p. 4). Specifically, they found that across the city, students' ELA and math scores were lowest in the grades with the most teacher turnover, and this disproportionately affected schools that served more African-American students or underperforming students.

Clearly teacher stress is associated with outcomes that are of grave concern to students and their families, teachers and administrators, and all levels of school governance. My findings suggest that teachers' perceptions of *demeaning* attitudes toward their occupation may contribute to teacher stress as an offense to self. The extent to which these perceptions factor into teachers' SOS is unclear, and continued investigation of this relationship will provide necessary insight into the relationship between perceptions of attitudes and stress for U.S. teachers.

### **Students' Parents' Adversarial Attitudes Toward Teachers**

Most participants (16) acknowledged that, in general, students' parents seemed to hold positive attitudes about their children's teachers, and previous research has supported this contention (Bingham, Haubrich, & White, 1989; Loveless, 1997). However, the participants' discussion of students' parents was dominated by references to parents perceived as harboring *adversarial* attitudes toward teachers. Although the majority of parents were not perceived as *adversarial*, the majority of the time and energy participants devoted to parents was in response to demands, threats, or accusations from *adversarial* parents.

Moreover, participants described feelings of fear or anxiety pertaining to their interactions with *adversarial* parents. According to Symeou (2005), teachers' fear of students' parents is based on teachers' perceptions of "family interaction as questioning their professional expertise and their traditional authority and status" (Symeou, 2005, p. 176). However, the participants in the present study reported interactions in which *adversarial* parents targeted them personally or threatened their job security, which seems to move beyond the ego threat-based fear Symeou (2005) described.

A more apt description of the participants' experience comes from school climate research in which a significant portion of teachers in a large, nationally-representative sample expressed concerns about *institutional vulnerability*, or "the extent to which a school is susceptible to a few vocal parents and citizen groups[, and that] both teachers and principals are unprotected and put on the defensive" (Hoy, Smith, & Sweetland, 2003, p. 42). Fears associated with perceptions of institutional vulnerability could be seen in the current study when 13 participants deliberately and explicitly differentiated between the "vocal minority" of *adversarial* parents and the majority of parents, whom participants perceived as having either positive or neutral attitudes toward teachers. It is reassuring that the participants perceived the majority of parents as espousing relatively positive attitudes toward teachers in light of the many positive outcomes associated with strong home-school connections (Christenson, 2004; Galindo & Sheldon, 2012; Henderson & Mapp, 2002); however, the prevalence of *adversarial* attitudes and fear in teachers' interactions with parents may be equally problematic.

*Adversarial* attitudes attributed to the "vocal minority" of parents may induce fear in teachers, and such fear, in time, can be damaging to teachers personally and professionally, and to students academically. Epstein and Becker (1982) found that teachers are less likely to attempt new and innovative instructional programs if they are

fearful of students' parents. As a result, teachers who are concerned about *adversarial* parents may avoid teaching topics, lessons, or units that could otherwise benefit students and enhance positive attitudes toward teachers and schools. Conley and Glasman (2008) found that fearful teachers "may be less than forthcoming about their performance shortcomings and/or goals" (p. 63). Considering the importance of honesty and transparency in promoting open, healthy school climates (Hoy, 2012), teachers' fears may negatively impact an entire school.

Multiple participants in the current study stated that they had considered leaving the field or had discouraged others from becoming teachers as a direct result of their own interactions with *adversarial* parents. Considering the significant negative association between teachers' sense of institutional vulnerability and organizational commitment (Hoy, Smith, & Sweetland, 2002), perceptions of *adversarial* attitudes in interactions with students' parents may be an influential factor in teacher turnover. As Othman and Kasuma (2016) explained, "A school that can be influenced by a little group of influential parents or community members can expect a low level of teacher commitment...because teachers have little reason to believe they will be supported or protected from these parties" (p. 23). Fortunately, the majority of participants in the current study attributed *trusting/supportive* attitudes to their administrators, a feeling that may protect against some of the detrimental effects of parents' *adversarial* attitudes due to the fact that *collegial leadership* (including administrators' concern for teachers' welfare) is significantly negatively associated with teachers' ratings of institutional vulnerability (Hoy, Smith, & Sweetland, 2002).

The participants' perceptions that small groups of parents have *adversarial* attitudes toward teachers may also help explain discrepancies in prior research on issues of teacher stress and job satisfaction. When large samples of teachers are asked to respond to questions about students' parents using multiple choice items, they may be forced to decide

between accurately representing the most salient experiences with parents, or their experiences with largest number of parents. For example, the Trust Scale from the *Family-School Relationships Survey* (Adams & Christenson, 2000) asks teachers to respond to statements about their relationships with students' parents based on a four-point Likert scale (i.e., *strongly disagree*, *disagree*, *agree*, *strongly agree*). The scale includes items such as, "I am confident that parents are friendly and approachable," and "I am confident that parents are receptive to my input and suggestions." Presumably, a teacher like Denise, who reported that 10% of parents were cynical and *adversarial* toward teachers, would be forced to choose between accurately describing the majority of her interactions with parents (*adversarial*), or describing her interactions with the majority of parents (*trusting/supportive*, *appreciative*). Mixed methods research is necessary to determine why and how teachers select the responses that they do based on their particular teaching context and their perceptions of parents' attitudes toward teachers.

### **Perceptions of Administrators' Ambivalent Attitudes**

Administrators, school principals and assistant principals in particular, have a tremendous impact on teachers' experiences (Kelly, Thornton, & Daugherty, 2005), levels of stress and wellbeing (Eyal & Roth, 2011; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005), and likelihood of remaining in the field (Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2013; Boyd et al., 2011; Mancuso, Roberts, & White, 2010; Singh & Billingsley, 1998). As such, the participants' perception of administrators' ambivalence toward teachers was of particular interest. Most of the participants reported that their administrators had *trusting/supportive* attitudes toward teachers; however, the majority also reported that administrators had *unprofessional* attitudes toward teachers.



Clearly the valences of these attitudes differ, particularly in terms of the emotional implications for the teachers who perceive them. However, it is important to note that participants' references to administrators' *trusting/supportive* and *unprofessional* attitudes overwhelmingly reflected differences between administrators, as opposed to the ambivalent attitudes of an individual administrator. Six participants attributed opposing attitudes to former and current administrators (Denise, Emily, Helen, Joy, Marcus, and Molly); five attributed opposing attitudes to various administrators in the school or district (Calvin, Dustin, Helen, Joy, and Lynne); and two participants, Kristina and Valerie, did in fact state that their building principals conveyed ambivalent attitudes toward the teachers in their schools.

These findings have implications for the continued investigation and promotion of positive school climate (Halpin & Croft, 1963; Miles, 1965), particularly in light of the fact that teachers' *perception* of principals' leadership style (and not the principal's self-described leadership style) is significantly associated with school climate measures (Kelly et al., 2005). *Collegial leadership*, one of the central factors of school climate, is the extent to which a principal "lets faculty know what is expected of them and maintains definite standards of performance" while also being, "supportive and egalitarian...considerate, helpful, and genuinely concerned about the welfare of teachers...open to exploring all sides of topics...and willing to make changes" (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2000, p. 437). This definition emphasizes the multiple roles that each administrator must balance in order to promote healthy school climate. However, the participants' perceptions of administrators' attitudes suggest that school leaders more often embody either the "supportive and egalitarian role" *or* the managerial role.

## **Appreciation in Student-Teacher Relations**

Participants were nearly unanimous in describing students' attitudes as *appreciative*. For many, this appreciation was conveyed in and defined by student-teacher relationships that "develop over the course of the school year through a complex intersection of student and teacher beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, and interactions with one another" (Hamre & Pianta, 2006, p. 59). Specifically, participants said students appreciated that teachers showed interest in or cared for the students, that teachers utilized effective and non-traditional types of instruction, that teachers were likeable and made school fun, and that they were dedicated to helping their students. The participants' perceptions of student appreciation mirrored college students' recollections of the teachers they most appreciated (Timmerman, 2009). Based on these recollections, Timmerman (2009) found that the college students admired PK-12 "Teachers who were not just experts, but who were also interested, engaged and playful, who fascinated and inspired them and who dared to show their personality and their identity as a human" (Sanderse, 2013, p. 33). The alignment between my participants' accounts and Timmerman's (2009) findings suggests that the participants in the current study were aware of the impact that they made through their relationships with students.

The similarity between Timmerman's (2009) and my own findings in terms of the student-teacher relational/interactional elements that students most appreciated also indicates the presence of a self-reinforcing feedback loop that can strengthen (or weaken) student-teacher relationships in school. Student-teacher relationship research based on self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1980) claims that both students and teachers are motivated by their needs for relatedness, autonomy, and competence in the classroom (Roth, Assor, Kanat-Maymon, & Kaplan, 2007; Ryan & Brown, 2005; Skinner & Belmont, 1992), and that their respective perceptions of these needs as fulfilled affect and are

affected by their interaction with the other party. As such, fostering positive, *appreciative* relationships between students and teachers should promote feelings of relatedness for both, thereby promoting motivation for all.

However, this motivational process often is undermined by external pressures (e.g., mandates/policies, testing, over-management by administrators) due to the fact that teachers tend to opt for more controlling (as opposed to autonomy-supportive) instructional practices when external pressures diminish their own sense of autonomy (Pelletier, Séguin-Lévesque, & Legault, 2002; Ryan and Brown, 2005; Roth et al, 2007). Additionally, “the more teachers’ satisfaction of autonomy is undermined, the less enthusiasm and creative energy they can bring to their teaching endeavors” (Niemic & Ryan, 2009, p. 140). Enthusiasm, enjoyment, and non-traditional forms of instruction were among the teacher-traits that students most appreciated, meaning that more controlling, less creative instruction likely will decrease students’ *appreciative* attitudes and overall motivation. As a result, students’ and teachers’ feelings of relatedness to one another may decline, further depressing motivations for all.

Although teachers should not need to perceive appreciation from students in order to run their classrooms effectively, the desire to work with and help children is one of the primary motivators for becoming a teacher (Watt & Richardson, 2007), and the “need for connecting with students may be a critical factor in shaping teachers’ intrinsic motivation and emotions” (Klassen, Perry, & Frenzel, 2012, p. 152). *Appreciative* attitudes from students seem to represent students’ recognition that a teacher has succeeded in reaching the students in one way or another. In turn, teachers’ recognition of this appreciation should increase their sense of relatedness (to students) and competence (as an effective educator), further motivating them in their teaching and increasing the likelihood that they will engage in the behaviors and practices that motivate their students to learn.

## BIOECOLOGICAL AND SOCIOCULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN PERCEIVED ATTITUDES

One of the primary objectives of this study was to investigate possible bioecological and sociocultural differences in teachers' perceptions of attitudes toward teaching. Potential sources of variation in participants' interpretations of attitudes included the state in which they taught, their teaching background and context, and participants' gender and racial identities. In the subsequent sections, findings pertaining to these differences will be contextualized in the existing literature, and their relevance to various stakeholders will be discussed.

### Regional Cultural Differences Between States

Sections of the interview protocol I used in this study were designed to encourage the participants to make generalizations about attitudes they perceived to be accepted broadly throughout U.S. society. Inevitably, however, their responses would be based on images of the wider world as viewed through the prism of their local cultural frames. Thus, the participants' generalizations about "U.S. society" or "national" culture inevitably reflected "the nationally centripetal *and* regionally centrifugal [forces]" (Lieske, 2010, p. 540; emphasis added) that had shaped their perceptions of the world. This may account for some of the differences in perceptions reported by teachers in Texas and Massachusetts.

The two state subgroups described similar experiences and perceptions regarding positive attitudes, although the teachers in Massachusetts were more prone than their peers in Texas to report that they perceived negative attitudes about teaching, particularly in the context of the macrosystem (see Figure 3). The most prominent difference between the state samples, however, involved teachers' perceptions of administrators' attitudes. Specifically, all nine of the participants in Texas described *trusting/supportive* attitudes in the context of their interactions with administrators, whereas less than half of the Massachusetts sample (4 of 9) did so. Moreover, eight of nine participants from

Massachusetts perceived *unprofessional* attitudes in their interactions with administrators as compared to only five in Texas. Hosp and Reschley (2000) identified a similar pattern regarding job satisfaction, whereby school psychologists in New England were “lowest in satisfaction with supervision” (p. 25) when compared to peers in other regions of the United States, including the “West South Central” region containing Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Oklahoma.

There are a number of state and regional cultural differences that may help explain why teachers from Texas and Massachusetts differed in how they described their perceptions of administrators’ attitudes toward teachers. Anecdotal and empirical evidence suggests that regional cultures in the United States differ in terms of *assertiveness*, or “willingness and interest in expressing positive and negative messages to others” (Atwater, Smither, Wang, & Fleenor, 2009, p. 877). Specifically, the cultures of the U.S. Northeast (including Massachusetts), Mid-Atlantic, and upper Midwest regions tend to be more assertive (Sigler, Burnett, & Child, 2008) and to favor assertiveness in others (Wall & Rude, 1987), whereas cultures in the South and lower Midwestern states tend to favor more reserved or passive communication styles. This may explain why the participants in Massachusetts reported more positive *and* negative attitudes than the teachers in Texas.

Regional culture also differs with regard to power distance, or “the extent to which one accepts that power in institutions and organizations is distributed unequally” (Kirkman, Chen, Farh, Xiong Chen, & Lowe, 2009, p. 745). Power distance also includes “beliefs about the extent to which superiors are entitled to status and privilege and the extent to which individuals should support and accept the views of superiors” (Botero & Van Dyne, 2009, p. 89). Thus, the tendency of teachers in Massachusetts to express their perceptions of administrators’ *unprofessional* attitudes (i.e., lack of respect for teachers as experts and professionals) appears to indicate that power distance is relatively low in Massachusetts.

Conversely, the teachers I interviewed from Texas reported fewer perceptions of administrators' *unprofessional* attitudes, and they attributed fewer negative attitudes to administrators in general, which suggests that power distance is higher in Texas' culture.

It is also possible, however, that administrators' attitudes toward teachers actually do differ between states. The standards for credentialing and training administrators are determined by institutions of state government, and therefore are shaped by each state's *political culture*, or "the summation of persistent patterns of underlying political attitudes and characteristic responses to political concerns" (Molina, 1998, p. 19). Difference in state standards for administrators may affect how they understand their work, their role within the school, and their relationships with teachers. There are similarities between the Massachusetts and Texas standards for school administrators (see Figure 4), yet the standards differ in terms of language, tone, and depth of prescription.

For instance, the five Texas *standards for school administrators* (Texas principal evaluation and support system, 2018) each include four to five basic *indicators* that an administrator has achieved the standard. Similarly, the four standards included in the Massachusetts *school-level administration rubric* (Massachusetts model system, 2012) are also divided into indicators. However, the indicators themselves are divided into "more specific descriptions of actions and behaviors related to each indicator" (i.e., *elements*), which are sub-divided further into "observable and measureable statements of educator actions and behaviors aligned to each element" (i.e., *descriptors*) (p. i). The precision and prescription of the Massachusetts standards are illustrative of the state's *moralistic* political culture, which situates democratic organization in governmental institutions (Molina, 1998).

Figure 4. Comparison of State Standards for School-Level Administrators

Massachusetts	Texas
(1) Instructional Leadership: <i>The education leader promotes the learning and growth of all students and the success of all staff by cultivating a shared vision that makes powerful teaching and learning the central focus of schooling.</i>	(1) Instructional Leadership: <i>You are responsible for ensuring every student receives high-quality instruction.</i>
(2) Management and Operations: <i>Promotes the learning and growth of all students and the success of all staff by ensuring a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment, using resources to implement appropriate curriculum, staffing, and scheduling.</i>	(2) Human Capital: <i>You are responsible for ensuring there are high-quality teachers and staff in every classroom throughout the school.</i>
(3) Family and Community Engagement: <i>Promotes the learning and growth of all students and the success of all staff through effective partnerships with families, community organizations, and other stakeholders that support the mission of the school and district.</i>	(3) Executive Leadership: <i>You are responsible for modeling a consistent focus and personal responsibility for improving student outcomes.</i>
(4) Professional Culture: <i>Promotes the learning and growth of all students by nurturing and sustaining a school culture of reflective practice, high expectations, and continuous learning for staff.</i>	(4) School Culture: <i>You are responsible for establishing and implementing a shared vision and culture of high expectations for all staff and students.</i>
	(5) Strategic Operations: <i>You outline and track clear goals, targets, and strategies aligned to a school vision that continually improves teacher effectiveness and student outcomes.</i>

Similarly, the simplicity of the Texas standards, and their emphasis on administrators' responsibilities as school leaders aligns with the attitudes of Texas' *traditionalistic-individualistic* political culture, which is inherently anti-bureaucratic and perceives governmental institutions as paternalistic (Molina, 1998). This political culture is reflected in the language of the Texas standards, which are written in the second-person case and emphasize administrators' agency and responsibility (e.g., "You are responsible for ensuring every student receives high-quality instruction"; see Figure 4). The Massachusetts standards, on the other hand, are written as third-person statements *about*

administrators (e.g., “The education leader promotes the learning and growth of students...”). In light of the fact that state standard for administrators dictate the curriculum and requirements of administrator licensure programs and administrator education, differences between the Massachusetts and Texas standards likely shape administrators’ understandings of their role within the school and community, and therefore may inform administrators’ attitudes toward teachers.

### **Differences in Teaching Background and Context**

Through my analyses of participant interviews, I identified interesting patterns in teachers’ perceptions of attitudes that corresponded with differences in their teaching backgrounds and contexts. With regards to background, participants’ perceptions of attitudes differed based on whether, as children, they had close family members who were teachers. There were recognizable differences also between those who had a career before becoming teachers (i.e., second-career teachers) and those for whom teaching was their first and only career (i.e. career teachers). In terms of teaching context, there were noteworthy differences based on school levels (i.e., elementary, middle school, high school) and community types (i.e., urban, suburban, small town/rural, other), and based on the proportion of students identified as economically disadvantaged in each participants’ school.

### ***Teachers in the Family***

Participants who had grown up with a teacher in their family appeared more apt to perceive *adversarial* attitudes in interactions with students’ parents. They also were less likely to perceive *appreciative* attitudes in their interactions with students. These findings are somewhat surprising considering the fact that teachers whose mothers were teachers tend to have higher job satisfaction (Maw, Ellsworth, & Holly, 2008). However, beyond



that, there is little empirical or theoretical literature that examines the connection between familial teacher role models and teachers' interactions with students or students' parents.

Jarvis-Sellinger, Pratt and Collins' (2011) longitudinal investigation of teacher commitment and teacher identity does provide some insight into the ways that having a teacher as a family member can inform teachers' self-evaluations and their understanding of the career as a whole. Specifically, Jarvis-Sellinger et al. (2011) found that participants who were highly committed to teaching (e.g., had always wanted to be teachers, expected to be teachers forever) cited family members' positive teaching experience as a basis for said commitment. However, highly committed teachers with low levels of teacher identity (i.e., had not yet developed an authentic sense of themselves as teachers) "had a clear understanding, in some cases a living example, of how a teacher was supposed to look and behave; and their self-assessment was in relation to that standard" (p. 78). Often, that standard was based on a sibling, parent, or extended family member who was or had been a teacher. Taking Jarvis-Sellinger and colleagues' (2011) study into account, it seems likely that the participants in the current study who had teachers in their families may have developed certain expectations about what it means to be a teacher, and about how teachers are supposed to be treated and addressed. When parent-teacher interactions conflict with expectations, these teachers may be more likely to interpret the interaction as *adversarial*.

Alternatively, it is possible that interpretations of *adversarial* attitudes are mediated by an individual trait similar to *stigma consciousness* (Pinel, 1999), which can result from repeated experiences of or exposure to instances of discrimination against members of a stigmatized group with which one identifies. As a result of these exposures, individuals develop high levels of stigma consciousness. Pinel (2004) found that "people high in stigma consciousness demonstrate a greater tendency than people low in stigma consciousness to make attributions to discrimination" (p. 39), to identify bias/prejudice in

ambiguous situations (Wang, Stroebe, & Dovidio, 2012), and to evaluate others' behavior as disrespectful (Pinel, 2004). Teaching certainly is not stigmatized, nor are teachers targets of discrimination; yet, if participants heard stories about *adversarial* parents from the teachers in their families or witnessed unpleasant interactions in which their teacher-family members were maltreated, it seems likely that they too could develop a similar propensity to interpret interactions as *adversarial*.

If such a trait exists and varies across teachers, it may explain why certain participants interpreted "I could never..." messages as negative whereas others interpreted them as positive. In terms of the impact this could have on teachers, it is worth turning once again to the literature on stigma consciousness. On a positive note, stigma consciousness has been associated with women's likelihood to take action against sexism (Wang, Stroebe, & Dovidio, 2012). If there is a trait that functions similarly for teachers, it could manifest in increased participation in unions, PTA, or school committees, which may in turn yield a heightened sense of social support and agency.

However, stigma consciousness is associated with more negative outcomes than positive outcomes at this point. Among minority men, stigma consciousness has been associated with hypertension and high blood pressure (Orom et al., 2016). In terms of occupational outcomes, women who believed that their jobs were seen as undesirable (indicating high levels of stigma-consciousness) suffered self-esteem loss (Major et al., 1999). Restaurant workers (Wildes, 2007) as well as university staff (Pinel & Paulin, 2005) who were highly conscious of stereotypical attitudes toward their occupational title (e.g., custodian, waitress) were more likely to leave their jobs. Although teaching is not stigmatized in the way that janitorial work is stigmatized (Charles, Loomis, & Demissie, 2009), my findings do demonstrate that participants who had teachers in their families were more conscious of certain negative attitudes toward their profession. As such, continued

research is needed to determine the range and variation of this sensitivity across a larger, more representative sample of teachers.

### ***Second-Career Teachers***

A number of interesting differences distinguished between the second-career and career teachers. For example, second-career teachers were more inclined than career teachers to perceive positive *occupational* attitudes in their interactions with students, and less inclined to report such attitudes in their interactions with friends and family. The latter finding is somewhat intuitive in that friends and family members who had positive beliefs about teaching as a career may have “assumed the next generation would also be teachers,” and therefore encouraged participants to become teachers or think of teaching as a good professional option (Lovitt, 2006, p. 43). The fact that second-career teachers did not become teachers earlier in their professional lives indicates that they were not subject to such encouragement.

Second-career teachers were also slightly less inclined to perceive administrators’ attitudes as *trusting/supportive*. Although the relationship between second-career teachers and their administrators has been the subject of little or no empirical investigation, it stands to reason that individuals with experiences in other fields likely would enter teaching with the expectation that they would be treated by school leaders in the same manner that they were treated by the supervisors/administrators in their other career. If this expectation is violated, it may be particularly jarring. Similar issues have been documented with regard to preservice teachers’ “unrealistic optimism” (Weinstein, 1988; 1989) about teaching, and how field experiences can result in a “shattered image” of teaching or of themselves as teachers (Cole & Knowles, 1995). In the case of preservice teachers, however, unrealistic expectations most often pertained to their imagined relationships with students and what

they had imagine imagined they would be able to do and achieve in the classroom. Second-career teachers who have spent time as professionals in other fields may not get caught up in these idealized self-perceptions, instead forming expectations about the job in comparison to the career that they left.

Second-career teachers also were more inclined than career teachers to perceive *stereotypes* in their interactions with people outside of school. Based on the data, it appears that this tendency is related to the participants' critical awareness of the misconceptions and stereotypes of teachers that they themselves believed before entering the classroom. This tended to come up when participants were asked what they thought non-teachers in the general public thought about various aspects of teaching. Molly (a former veterinary technician) said that before she became a teacher she thought teaching would be easy, and she attributed the same belief to the general population. Keith (former music industry talent scout) noted that before he became a teacher, he assumed that content knowledge was the most important skill for a teacher to have, and he presumed that non-teachers in the general public likely believed that as well. Lynne (a former development officer for an international non-profit organization) also reflected on her prior view of teachers when asked to describe the broad, macrosystemic beliefs and attitudes toward teaching, as did Allison.

Interestingly, Kristina (daughter of a teacher; former political aide), Emily (daughter of a teacher; former nurse), and Valerie (former food service worker) were the only second-career teachers who did not use their own prior attitudes or misinformed beliefs about teaching as examples of common, pervasive attitudes and beliefs. Although the small sample of second-career teachers prevents over-generalizing beyond the sample itself, it seems plausible that Kristina and Emily, as daughters of teachers, may always have had more positive attitudes and realistic understandings of teaching than did the other second-career teachers. After all, "Seeing close friends or siblings [or other family

members] enjoy their work as teachers helped [many second-career teachers] realize that teaching was something they themselves might usefully consider” (Lovitt, 2006 p. 45). Valerie did not have a teacher in her family, although her prior career had been in food service, which is physically demanding, unstable/unpredictable, and often stigmatized (Wildes, 2007). Therefore, teaching may have offered Valerie an opportunity for upward mobility, and an escape from interactions in which others’ attitudes about her job were almost certainly negative.

### ***School Level***

Findings of the current study indicated that participants who taught high schools were more likely than K-8 teachers to perceive *trusting/supportive* attitudes from students’ parents. However, this conflicts with existing research on parent-teacher relationships across grade levels. Adams and Christenson (2000) measured parent-teacher trust in a suburban school district and found that elementary parents and teachers were the most trusting of one another. Still others have found that elementary teachers perceive slightly more trust in their relationships with their students’ parents than the parents do, and that both parties perceive relations to be fairly trusting (Nzinga-Johnson, Baker, & Aupperlee, 2009).

Unfortunately, the vast majority of research on trust in parent-teacher relationships focuses on elementary grades. Deslandes and Bertrand (2005) tested Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler’s (1997) model of parent involvement processes for students in grade 7-9, which provided some insight into how middle grades might compare to elementary in terms of trust, although it concentrated on parents’ perceptions of teachers’ trust as opposed to the teachers’ perceptions of parents’ trust. Deslandes and Bertrand (2005) found that 8<sup>th</sup> graders’ parents’ motivation to become involved directly with the school was explained

largely by their perceptions of trust from the teacher, and their perceptions of trust were informed by teachers' direct contact with parents.

There is little doubt that trust is central to strong home-school connections at all levels (Adams & Christenson, 2000), and that strong home-school connections are good for students (Hoy, 2002). Considering my findings pertaining to high school teachers' perceptions of *trusting/supportive* attitudes from parents, as well as the paucity of research on perceptions of parental trust in secondary grades, further research is needed on levels, effects, and promotion of trust between parents and teachers of secondary students.

### ***Community Type***

In general, participants working in suburban schools perceived more positive attitudes in their interactions with parents. Teachers' expectations of parents' in-school involvement and perception of what parent involvement should look like often are based on the involvement patterns typical of white, middle-class, and wealthy parents (Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Lawson, 2003). As such, teachers tend to give lower rating of parental involvement to parents who are economically disadvantaged or identify as people of color (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). This may account for the relatively positive perception of interactions with parents in suburban as opposed to urban schools.

Participants who taught in urban schools, on the other hand, were more likely to perceive *unprofessional* attitudes in interactions with administrators. One possible explanation for this may be that urban schools face certain pressures and demands that do not affect suburban or small-town schools in equal measure (e.g., student transience, intense public accountability, lower student achievement scores). These factors can serve to destabilize urban schools, and "when schools start to become less stable, [they] take on the characteristics of a 'frontier culture' [and] strong formal leadership is typically

sought...in order to reestablish coherence and direction” (Jacobson, Brooks, Giles, Johnson, & Ylimaki, 2007, p. 293). Moreover, Jacobson et al. (2007) noted that “...increased calls for teacher empowerment” can increase school leaders’ sense that the school is unstable, leading administrators to increase their “formal leadership” (p. 293) instead of granting more autonomy or control to the teachers, which may be interpreted by teachers as evidence of the administrator’s *unprofessional* attitudes toward teachers.

### ***Students’ Socioeconomic Status***

When examining participants’ perceptions of attitudes alongside the proportions of economically disadvantaged students in their schools, the main difference was that participants in high-poverty schools (i.e., 67-100% of students identified as economically disadvantaged) were far more likely to perceive *respectful* attitudes in their interactions with students. These finding run counter to many of the stereotypes of low-SES schools and their students, lending further evidence in opposition to the concept of a *culture of poverty*. As Gorski (2008) pointed out, “the culture of poverty concept is constructed from a collection of smaller stereotypes which, however false, seem to have crept into mainstream thinking as unquestioned fact” (p. 33). Unfortunately, these stereotypes have been found to impact economically disadvantaged families (Lott, 2001) and students (Croizet & Claire, 1998) in a number of detrimental ways. In light of this, the increased tendency of participants who work in high-poverty schools to perceive students’ attitudes as *respectful* may serve as a powerful counter-narrative that could be used to up-end existing stereotypes of young people who are economically disadvantaged and about the realities of working with large populations of students identified as economically disadvantaged (Bomer, Dworin, May, & Semingson, 2008; Rosenthal, 1993; Ullucci & Howard, 2015).

As a caveat, however, it is worth noting that participants who work in high-poverty schools, despite their tendency to perceive of their students as *respectful*, may still perpetuate classism if they “adopt and maintain deficit and pathological thinking about the academic potential of students who come from impoverished backgrounds” (Ullucci & Howard, 2015, p. 172). It is even possible that what they perceive to be *respectful* is something more akin to *submissive*. Further research is needed to determine precisely what it means when an economically disadvantaged student attitude is perceived as *respectful*. Hopefully, pending further research, the findings of the present study can stand as additional empirical support for the existing literature that aims to counteract the historical classism that has pervaded classrooms, schools, educational policy, and educational research itself.

### **Race and Gender Differences in Perceptions of Unprofessional Attitudes**

Because this is a qualitative study with a relatively small sample of participants and no statistical or causal components, it is beyond the scope of this research to address causality or correlation between any factors. However, analyses of the participants’ interviews and consideration of their sociocultural contexts and demographics suggest that teachers’ perceptions of attitudes about teaching may be related to teachers’ gender and racial identity. In terms of gender, male participants in this study perceived *unprofessional* attitudes far more than female participants across a number of bioecological contexts (i.e., administrators, exosystem, macrosystem). Based on this, it appears that men, who are socialized “in the United States, as well as other nations [to enact] masculine...traits such as dominant, independent, assertive, and strong” (Weisgram, Dinella, & Fulcher, 2011, p. 244), may perceive *unprofessional* attitudes more keenly than women, who typically are socialized to be “warm, sympathetic, sensitive...soft-spoken [and] submissive...” (p. 245).



Moreover, women and girls tend to seek approval and are more concerned with social desirability (Herbert et al., 1997), which may relate to female participants' tendency to describe more *appreciative* and *trusting/supportive* attitudes.

These gender role differences relate to differences in interpretations of attitudes toward teaching via "gender differences in occupational values" (Weisgram, Dinella, & Fulcher, 2011, p. 244) and *value affordances*, or the values one expects to have fulfilled in a particular line of work (Renninger, Wade, & Grammar, 2004). Generally speaking, men are drawn to occupations where they will be challenged, paid well, and will be able to take risks and rise through the ranks of the organization. Moreover, they seek jobs that will grant them prestige, a high level of responsibility, and control or power over other people (Abu-Saad & Isralowitz, 1997; Eccles, 1994). These values parallel many of the characteristics of *professionalism* (e.g., status/prestige, high pay, autonomy, upward mobility, high levels of responsibility, expertise) (Demirkasimoglu, 2010). However, very few of these values are found in teaching. Thus, it stands to reason that the male participants, and men in general, would be more prone to interpret *unprofessional* attitudes toward teachers in their interactions with administrators.

A similar argument could be made regarding variation in perceptions of attitudes along racial lines, and there is some evidence in this study that could support this contention. However, only three teachers of color participated in the study, each of whom had a different racial identity. Therefore, any discussion of possible racial differences in perceptions of attitudes toward teachers, although inspired by the participants' interviews, is essentially theoretical and is not intended to be generalized beyond the current study.

That being said, I was interested to see that only one of the three participants of color referred to *unprofessional* attitudes (Lynne described an incident in which her principal denied her request for one unpaid day off to do professional development in South

Africa), and beyond this single incident, the participants of color did not address *unprofessional* attitudes whatsoever. Among white participants, however, it was one of the most commonly cited themes across a number of context and sites of interaction. Twelve of the 15 white participants (80%) contextualized *unprofessional* attitudes in their interactions with administrators, and eight of 15 in interactions with students' parents. In fact, there was only one white participant (Farrah) who did not attribute *unprofessional* attitudes to either administrators or students' parents, although she did endorse *unprofessional* attitudes with regard to the exosystem, as did six other white participants. Four white participants referred to *unprofessional* attitudes within the meso- and macrosystems as well.

Based on these findings, it does appear that, unlike participants of color, white participants were deeply concerned with the concept of teacher professionalism, and white men were particularly concerned with this issue. Although my small sample size does not allow for broad empirical claims to be made with regards to this topic, there is historical and theoretical precedent for racial and gender differences in value affordances of professional respect and professionalism. According to Weems (2004), the concept of professionalism and the rise of the professional class during the Progressive era “was linked to a desire to predict, regulate, and control a growing social body constituted by... urbanization, immigration, industrialization, and the rising class of educated women” (p. 252). In order to do so, professionalism had to be exclusive, masculine, and white. In fact, at the time, “leaders of political and social reform (including educational leaders) often invoked the term Anglo-Saxon or WASP (white Anglo-Saxon Protestant) to refer to the ideal professional” (Weems, 2004, p. 250). They were explicit in associating professionalism with whiteness and masculinity.

Although women were excluded from the professional realm at the time, middle class and/or white women could attend schools of domestic science in order to be deemed “domestic professionals.” In this way, professionalism, which was in and of itself a racialized project, also “mapped onto the doctrines of natural law and separate spheres, which constituted professionalism as an already masculine enterprise” (p. 238). This white, male conception of professionalism has been systematically reproduced since its inception to the point that it is no longer explicit, but rather inherent and embedded in the use of terms such as *semi-professional* (Etzioni, 1969) to stand in for the outdated *domestic professional* when referring to feminized occupations such as teaching, nursing, and social work.

The perpetuation of this history can be seen in the enduring status, prestige, and pay differences between “masculine” and “feminine” occupations (Glick, Wilk, & Perreault, 1995), as well as the growth of *respectability politics* and similar “strategies to lift the black poor out of their condition by preparing them for the [professional] market economy” (Harris, 2014, p. 33). In light of this, calls for the professionalization of teaching are complicated and problematic. On the one hand, “professional” occupations have higher status and higher pay, and teachers have been vocal in their desire for both of these assets. However, professionalization may also make schools less inviting, less comfortable occupational homes for people of color and for women, as they continue to be viewed as inherently unprofessional.

## **Conclusion**

Throughout Chapter 5, I mentioned potential implications of my findings that could impact teachers, students, schools, and various other stakeholders in American education. I also made suggestions about continuing research that is needed to elucidate further the

phenomena revealed in my findings. In this final section, before revisiting these topics, I discuss limitations of this study. Then I close the chapter with a concentrated explanation of implications for school and district administrators, teacher educators, and future research.

## **LIMITATIONS**

Although this study has implications for a number of stakeholders in U.S. schools, it is not without limitations. The gravest limitation is the underrepresentation of teachers of color. The number of teachers in the United States who identify as people of color is disproportionately low overall (18%; Golding, Gray, & Bitterman, 2013). The small sample of teachers of color in my study (3 of 18; 17%) fell slightly short of that figure, and the proportion of teachers of color in Texas is twice that of my sample. Moreover, it is important to over-represent the voices of groups who historically have been excluded from academic and scholarly discourses.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, I contacted all of the teachers of color who completed the interest survey (9) before reaching out to white teachers. I suspect that the time at which I contacted these teachers was particularly busy or in some way interfered with their willingness or ability to respond. As a result, I did not interview enough teachers of color to establish a reasonable impression of the types of experiences that teachers of color have, and how they perceive others' attitudes toward their profession.

My study was limited also by the small number of participants who worked in small town/rural schools (2). Technically, the majority of schools in Texas are categorized as rural (TEA, 2016a), and rural schools tend to differ from suburban and urban schools in consequential ways (Beeson, 2001; Mitchem, Kossar, & Ludlow, 2006). Nonetheless, small town/rural teachers are often overlooked in the literature. This study would have been

strengthened in terms of content and relevance had I been able to recruit a larger sample of teachers who work in small town/rural schools.

Additionally, I did not conduct follow-up interviews with the participants. As I read through each interview transcripts, increasingly I recognized that follow-up interviews would have strengthened this study and allowed me to ask for clarification or elaboration, and to ask more pointed questions when applicable. There were also a number of participants who had gotten off-topic during interviews and therefore did not answer the exact questions that I asked. Had I conducted follow-up interviews, I could have revisited these questions. Through the process of member checking, I was able to request clarification in a general sense, although more direct, focused follow-up interviews would have made the study more comprehensive and trustworthy.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

With the current study, I sought to examine teachers' perceptions of attitudes toward teaching in order to determine whether it could be a relevant topic of continuing research. I found that teachers' perceptions of attitudes were not only fascinating, but they had clear practical implications for teachers, principals (and other district administrators), teacher educators, and teacher researchers. In the following section, I begin by describing a number of practical implications for school personnel and teacher educators. I close this chapter by addressing implications and directions for future research.

### **Practical Implications for Improving School Climate**

Based on the participants' self-described perceptions of attitudes toward teaching, I came to recognize parallels between the current study and the language of school climate research. In light of this, practical and theoretical implications of this work are informed heavily by the literature on school and organizational climate.

Perhaps the most pervasive issue that participants described in relation to school climate involved their perceptions of *adversarial* attitudes in their interactions with “a vocal minority” of students’ parents. In the school climate literature, this is referred to as *institutional vulnerability*. Earlier, I described some of the negative outcomes associated with institutional vulnerability that impact virtually all members of the school community. Fortunately, *collegial leadership*, or teachers’ perceptions that principals/administrators are both collegial and authoritative, can mitigate teachers’ perceptions that they are under attack from *adversarial* parents.

However, based my findings, it appeared that some principals/administrators struggle to balance collegiality and authority in their interactions with teachers. Furthermore, suggesting that principals must improve their collegial leadership in order to quell teachers’ fear of *adversarial* parents puts tremendous pressure on school leaders, particularly in light of principals’ own concerns and outright fears about institutional vulnerability. However, teachers and principals are far from the only personnel in a school, and there are important school leaders, including instructional coaches, department chairs, and education team facilitators (ETF), who can serve as resources for teachers and principals as well as those parents who have concerns about their children’s progress, treatment, or behavior at school.

Instructional coaches could play an especially powerful role in reshaping negative parent-teacher relations. Coaches are “master teacher who offer on-site and ongoing instructional support for teachers” (Marsh, Sloan McCombs, & Martorell, 2010, p. 873) based on semi-regular observations of teachers in their classrooms. Therefore, if a teacher is anxious about meeting with a parent perceived to have *adversarial* attitudes, a coach may serve as a reliable eye-witness on behalf of the teacher. Moreover, coaches are directly engaged with helping teacher grow and improve. In light of this, the presence of a coach

may signal to parents that their concerns are being taken seriously, and that high-quality instruction and student growth are shared priorities for all parties.

### **Practical Implications for Teacher Education**

The current study also has implications for teacher educators. Specifically, my findings suggest that expectations about teaching and imagined teacher selves may impact teachers' perceptions of attitudes toward teaching. For instance, the fact that relative to career teachers, second-career teachers tended to perceive more *unprofessional* attitudes towards teachers/teaching may be related to expectations that they would be viewed and treated by administrators the same way they were treated by supervisors in their previous careers. It also appeared that the participants who had teachers in their families may have had expectations about how teachers were supposed to be treated and addressed, and they were particularly sensitive to violations of these expectations.

Teacher educators should encourage preservice teachers to make their expectations explicit and think about the origin of their expectations. This may help preservice teachers set more realistic goals or imagine multiple future selves. This work may be important for second-career teachers and preservice teachers with teachers in their families as well as male preservice teachers, who may expect masculine value affordances to be fulfilled by teaching. Male preservice teachers should be aware of the actual affordances of teaching so they can focus on the benefits of teaching as a career instead of dwelling on the absence of traditionally masculine occupational values.

Furthermore, teacher preparation programs can help preservice and student teachers establish adaptive expectations about attitudes toward teachers by placing student teachers in schools and classrooms where positive attitudes toward teachers are modeled as institutional norms. According to Koerner, Rust, and Baumgartner (2002) “student

teaching is a complicated emotional and interpersonal experience that is often critically important to the making of a teacher” (p. 36). In particular, cooperating teachers “set the affective and intellectual tone and also shape what student teachers learn by the way they conceive and carry out their roles as teacher educators” (Feiman-Nemset & Bachmann, 1987, p. 256). Thus, by placing student teachers in schools where administrators and parents have positive, respectful attitudes toward teachers, and identifying cooperating teachers who earn and receive these positive attitudes, student teachers will come to see themselves, and teacher generally, as deserving of respect.

### **Implications and Direction for Future Research**

A number of topics addressed in this study require further scholarly investigation. Most importantly, this study should be replicated with a more diverse, balanced sample, particularly with regard to racial diversity, school level, and community type (i.e., small town/rural schools). Racial differences identified in this study had to be discussed in tentative terms because of the small number of participants of color, yet the tentative findings pertaining to race may have important implications for continuing research on teacher professionalism/professionalization, and therefore require continued study.

Male participants tended to perceive more *unprofessional* attitudes than female participants did. As explained earlier in this chapter, there is ample sociological evidence to explain why men may be more concerned with the constituent factors of professionalism, although it is possible that male teachers perceive different attitudes because attitudes toward male and female teachers may differ. In order to determine if either or both of these possibilities hold true, I recommend in-depth case studies of male and female teachers who work at the same schools. This particular methodology, unlike cross-sectional research or retrospective interviews, would afford a more accurate and immediate image of teachers’



experiences that would also allow for a more nuanced comparison of male and female teachers' experiences as well as their interpretations of said experiences. In so doing, researchers could determine whether male and female teachers do in fact perceive different levels of *unprofessional* attitudes, and if the differences in their perceptions represent interpretive differences or differences in their lived experiences.

Quantitative studies of teachers' perceptions of unprofessional attitudes could also be informative, particularly in determining whether perceptions of attitudes may be moderated by race and/or gender. Specifically, modeling the effect of race and gender on the relationship between professionalism and job satisfaction may support or refute Weems' (2004) claim that professionalism is inherently masculine and white, such that white men are given the most access to professionalism and are more concerned with professionalism than people of color or white women.

Finally, my findings included some evidence that there may be an individual trait that functions similarly to stigma consciousness (Pinel, 1999), leading certain teachers to become particularly sensitive to or aware of negative attitudes toward teachers. Specifically, I argued that participants who had teachers in their families may have witnessed or been exposed to more instances of negative attitudes toward teachers through conversations with their teacher-family members. If this trait exists and functions similarly to stigma consciousness, increased exposure to negative attitudes could manifest in a heightened awareness of and sensitivity to negative attitudes toward teachers. In order to test this hypothesis, further research on teachers with and without teachers in their family is necessary to determine what types of messages about teaching had been conveyed to each group when they were young, and to continue investigating differences in their perceptions of attitudes toward teachers.

## **Appendix**

### **Finalized Interview Protocol**

#### **Section 1: Experiences as a student**

Q1: Tell me a bit about where you grew up and what your schools were like when you were growing up.

Q2: What did you think of your teachers when you were in school?

Q3: Were there any teachers that really made an impact on you either in a positive way or a negative way?

#### **Section 2: Becoming a teacher**

Q4: Tell me about when you made the choice to become a teacher?

Q5: Do you remember how your family reacted when they found out that you were pursuing a career in teaching?

Q6: What about your peers? Did you have any conversations with them at the time about your decision to become a teacher?

Q7: How did you become certified? What was that experience like?

Q8: Thinking about the present, now that you have been a teacher for \_\_\_\_ years, if you were invited to career day at the local high school, what would you say about being a teacher and why?

#### **Section 3: Teacher in school context**

Q9: Tell me about your current school your current teaching assignment.

Q10: Have you taught at this school your entire career? (If not) Has your experience at your current school been similar to your past teaching experiences?

Q11: How do you think teachers at your current school are perceived by the administration, families, and the students?

Q12: Tell me about a time that something happened at school that made you feel really great about the fact that you are a teacher.

Q13: Tell me about a time that something happened at school that made you feel really bad about the fact that you are a teacher.

Q14: In general, how do you feel about being a teacher? Do you think that has changed over the course of your career?

#### **Section 4: Teachers outside of school**

Q15: How often would you say your job comes up in conversations outside of school?

Q16: Are there particular situations and places where it is more likely to come up in conversation or less likely to come up in conversation?

Q17: Are there people with whom it comes up and others with whom it doesn't?

Q18: When someone asks you what you do and you tell them you're a teacher, what are some examples of the types of responses you might get?

Q19: What goes through your mind or what do you feel or say when you hear those responses that you mentioned?

Q20: Tell me about a time that something happened outside of school that made you feel really great about the fact that you are a teacher?

Q21: Tell me about a time something happened outside of school that made you feel bad about the fact that you are a teacher?

Q22: How do you see teachers represented in your social media?

## **Section 5: Comparisons to Non-Teachers**

Q23: What do you think non-teachers perceive to be the most rewarding or enjoyable things about being a teacher?

Q24: What do you think non-teachers perceive to be the hardest things about being a teacher?

Q25: What do you think non-teachers would say makes someone a good teacher?

Q26: Now putting the general public aside, I'm curious what *you* would say are some of the most rewarding or enjoyable things *for you* about being a teacher.

Q27: What are some of the hardest things *for you* about being a teacher?

Q28: And what, *in your opinion*, makes someone a good teacher?

Q29: Overall, how closely would you say the general public's perceptions of teaching and teachers as aligned with your own experiences and perceptions of teaching?

## **Section 6: Closing Questions**

Q30: That is the end of the questions I had prepared, but is there anything in general that I missed or that you would want to add in terms of how other people's attitudes toward the teaching profession have been conveyed to you, or about relevant interactions and experiences you've had or seen, or about perceptions of teaching in general?

Q31: Do you have any questions for me?

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